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# **Studies in Early Church History**



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**HENRY T. SELL, D.D.**





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**STUDIES IN EARLY  
CHURCH HISTORY**



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# STUDIES IN EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

BY

HENRY T. SELL, D. D.

*Author of "Supplemental Bible Studies," "Bible Study by Books," "Bible Study by Periods," "Bible Study by Doctrines," "Bible Studies in the Life of Christ," "Bible Studies in the Life of Paul," "Studies in the Life of the Christian"*

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## PREFACE

THE period of which these studies treat extends from the time of Christ to the reign of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor. This era has been called, "The Heroic Age of the Church." It was during these three hundred years that Christianity encountered the bitter hostility of the Roman and Greek religions and systems of philosophy and was under the ban of the civil power. It was then that it formulated its doctrines, set forth its principles, wrote its New Testament books and endured its fiery persecutions. In the enthusiasm and freshness of their faith, its converts dared all things; no tasks were too hard, no hardships too great and no tortures too painful, when called for in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour.

We are in the immediate presence of the builders of the Church; we see their plans; we look upon the laying of the great broad foundations. We behold the struggle with refractory materials and we are impressed with the undaunted spirit and courageous dealing with difficulties, as this magnificent spiritual structure—grandly simple in its organization and forms of worship—is erected.

In these studies the aim is to set forth the great leading facts in regard to the belief and life of the early Church; hence the ten divisions or studies: 1. The Church in Jerusalem. 2. The Church in Antioch. 3. The Church in the Provinces. 4. The Church in Rome. 5. The Church in the Catacombs. 6. The Church in Worship. 7. The Church in the Books. 8. The Church in Controversy. 9. The Church in Persecution. 10. The Church in Victory.

This book is for the use of adult Bible and teacher training classes, Bible study circles, educational institutions and private study. It is uniform with the author's other "Seven Books of Bible Studies."

HENRY T. SELL.





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# Studies in Early Church History

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## STUDY I

### THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

#### THE BEGINNING

**The Christian Church** was prepared for by the Jewish church, but it had its beginning in Jesus Christ. He is its Founder (Matthew 16 : 15-20 ; John 14 : 6 ; Matthew 26 : 28 ; John 11 : 25, 26 ; 12 : 32 ; Matthew 28 : 19, 20 ; Acts 1 : 8) and Foundation (1 Corinthians 2 : 2 ; 3 : 11 ; Philippians 2 : 9-11).

“Very early in the ministry of Jesus Christ we observe indications that He intended to found a society, based upon the principles of The Kingdom of God, in which the members should be held together by outward and visible ties of fellowship in addition to a common belief and the observance of certain sacraments.” This society is the church or assembly.

The word church in the New Testament is used in three senses to denote the difference in the form.

1. The local congregation worshipping in a house (Philomon 2 ; Colossians 4 : 15) or a certain place as “The church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1 : 2) and “The church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thessalonians 1 : 1). This is much the most frequent use of the word.

2. The entire community of Christians throughout the world or some portions of it (1 Corinthians 15 : 9 ; Galatians 1 : 13 ; Matthew 16 : 18).

3. The total company of the redeemed, the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5 : 23, 25, 27, 30 ; Hebrews 12 : 23).

Those who joined the early Christian church did so because of their belief in Christ as the Messiah (John 1 : 41) and their acceptance of Him as their Saviour (Acts 2 : 36-41).

**The First Candidates for Membership** in the church were attracted to Jesus, followed Him and sought to have their relatives and friends follow Him, because of the testimony of John the Baptist that " This is the Son of God " (John 1 : 34-51).

**The First Sermon** was preached by Christ upon a mountain in Galilee (Matthew 5 : 1-7 : 29). Here he laid down the principles which were to guide the conduct and lives of His followers. He taught the blessedness of those who accepted these principles (Matthew 5 : 1-16), their relations to the world, to their fellow men and to God. The appeal was to the inner life (Matthew 6 : 1-6 ; 7 : 1-5), to conform it to the law of God and to seek to please Him first in all things (Matthew 6 : 20-24, 33 ; 5 : 48).

Jesus taught many things, not set forth in the Sermon on the Mount, in regard to Himself, but the " root principle of the Kingdom proclaimed by Him was the allegiance of the soul to Himself as its supreme Lord." He said, " I am the way, the truth and the life " (John 14 : 6) ; " I am the vine, ye are the branches " (John 15 : 5), and " He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life " (John 6 : 47 ; 3 : 17 ; 20 : 30, 31).

Necessarily His disciples did not fully understand much of what Jesus taught about " the nature of salvation through Himself, for it had not yet been revealed by His sufferings, death and resurrection."

**The First Form of Prayer** is given in connection with the " Sermon on the Mount," and is known as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6 : 9-13). Christ here teaches that God loves man and stands in the relation of a Father to him. Man is also taught the proper approach to God and the right objects of prayer. It is the perfect pattern for all



prayer. It has expressed in it, "petition, intercession and thanksgiving; all essential objects of prayer—spiritual and temporal, divine and human—in the most suitable and beautiful order."

**The First Missionaries.**—Jesus was not only incessant in His own efforts to bring men to a knowledge of the truth, but He sent forth "The Twelve" (Luke 9 : 1-6), who were in immediate attendance upon Him, and "appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place, whither He Himself would come" (Luke 10 : 1-17). Careful instructions were given these first missionaries in regard to the proper way of approaching people, what and how they were to preach and how they were to act in case of their rejection. The needs and the dangers of the work were impressed upon their minds.

**Baptism and the Lord's Supper.**—Baptism, the outward sign of an inward cleansing, was a badge of discipleship and commanded by Jesus in His last instructions to His disciples (Matthew 28 : 19).

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ to commemorate His work and His atoning death (Matthew 26 : 26-29; Mark 14 : 22-24; Luke 22 : 19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11 : 23-26). In giving His disciples the bread Jesus said, "This is My body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22 : 19). In passing the cup He said, "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26 : 28).

**The Policy** was that of an aggressive extension of the work. Jesus knew that He was to depart in bodily presence from the earth. He predicted His death and in so doing He also prepared His followers for the great task before them in extending the mission of the church "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1 : 8). His church was not to be for one age or one people, but for all ages and all peoples and in His spiritual presence He was to be in all its work (Matthew

28 : 18-20). Here was a decidedly new and startling idea in the world of religion. Hitherto religions had been narrow and circumscribed ; each nation or people had its own exclusive gods which were supposed to protect it and to which it looked for all benefits beyond its power. But this new religion, Christianity, declared boldly and openly that these national gods were naught and called upon all men everywhere to repent and believe in Jesus Christ. It is not to be wondered at that the first Christian teachers and preachers met with such strong opposition and persecution in carrying out the command of their Lord to proselyte all nations.

### THE BAPTISM BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

**Time.** From the Ascension of Christ to the martyrdom of Stephen, 30-35 A. D.

This baptism marks not only a great epoch in the history of the church, but of the world. Many writers date the beginning of the Christian church from this baptism. The agency of the Holy Spirit is very marked in the record of the Acts. He is mentioned about seventy times.

The particular period in the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the church—treated in this study, from this point to the close—is from the day of Pentecost to the martyrdom of Stephen, the first deacon (Acts 2 : 1-7 : 60). The action is all in the city of Jerusalem and is marked by the display of marvellous divine power. This is a natural division occupying in time about five years, 30-35 A. D. The command of Christ was here fulfilled that His disciples should first witness for Him in Jerusalem (Acts 1 : 8) the place of His death and resurrection.

**The General Preparation** for this baptism (Acts 2 : 1-12) was long and arduous. It is true that when it came to pass, it came suddenly, but the way and the men had been made ready. The Old Testament prophets had foretold it and sought to qualify the people to receive it. Jesus had not only had His disciples under careful training, but He had gone up and down and roundabout through Palestine preach-

ing and teaching things pertaining to the Kingdom to all who would listen. Then His trial, death and resurrection had been so accomplished, in the sight of a multitude of people, when Jerusalem was crowded with Jews attending the Passover, that these great events were upon every tongue.

But now when Jesus has accomplished His mission on earth, in bodily form, He bids His disciples wait until they shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost (Acts 1 : 5).

It was not sufficient that the multitude without and the disciples themselves, much more intimately, should have a knowledge of the facts about Christ, but there must be an added divine power through the Holy Spirit to make these facts glow with life and a light which should change men's hearts and cause them to turn to their Saviour. The witnesses to the facts were to testify for Christ after the descent of the Holy Spirit and not before. The Christian church was planned not as a human, but a divine creation ; without the Spirit it has no power ; with the Spirit it is the mightiest institution on earth.

**The Immediate Preparation.**—After the ascension of Jesus, the disciples returned to Jerusalem, repaired to the upper room of a certain house and held a ten days' prayer-meeting. There they "all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1 : 12-14).

It is significant that this goodly number of disciples, "about an hundred and twenty," spent their waiting time not in discussion or speculation over the wonderful events which they had recently witnessed and what would come to pass in the immediate future, but they placed themselves in an attitude of earnest and prayerful expectancy. Their supreme desire was to be used in the most effective way to promote the salvation of men. It is not too much to say that any church—if all the members would come together, or any considerable number of them, in a like spirit for a ten days' prayer-meeting—might likewise have a wonderful outpouring of the spirit. The way to divine blessing is still through prayer.

**The Fulfillment of the Promise** made by Christ, before His death (John 14: 16, 17; 16: 7-15) and after His resurrection (Acts 1: 5, 8) came to pass on the day of Pentecost on the morning of Saturday or Sunday May 27 or 28, 30 A. D.

It was a fitting time for the display of divine power. This feast of Pentecost was the second of the great feasts of the Jews. It was so named because it was kept on the fiftieth day after the Passover. It was the feast of harvest and of first fruits. Because of its being in the summer greater numbers were present in Jerusalem than at any other season from all parts of the world. "From a census taken in the time of Nero more than 2,700,000 people were gathered at the Passover and still greater numbers came to Pentecost." It was on this day that the Jew was to remember that he had been a bondman in the land of Egypt and had been led forth to freedom. It was also the traditional memorial day of the giving of the law on Sinai. It was therefore specially suitable for a new manifestation of the spirit and the giving of a new spiritual law in Christ and the leading of the people out into a new religious freedom. It was a great feast of the gathering of the first fruits of Christ on earth.

**The Descent of the Holy Spirit** is the record of a historical fact and the most simple fact is sometimes not easy of explanation. The narrative, however, is a plain one and is told in a comparatively few sentences. The disciples are with one accord in one place. Suddenly there is the sound as of a rushing mighty wind. Cloven tongues like as of fire sit upon the disciples' heads. It is not said that it is a rushing mighty wind, but like the sound of it. It is not said that the tongues are of fire but like it (Acts 2: 2, 3). The writer is attempting to describe a supernatural event in comparative terms. The disciples are, however, filled with a power beyond their comprehension. They are enthused with the Holy Spirit. They become new men speaking with extraordinary facility and ease. All their timidity and hesi-



tation have departed. They speak with other tongues (Acts 2 : 4) as the spirit gives them utterance.

The symbol of the flaming tongues has large meaning in it. Fire is a representative characteristic of the Holy Spirit ; it is bright and glorious and not only represents His revealing power, but also His purifying and cleansing power. "The human tongue, illuminated and sanctified by fire from the inner sanctuary, was about to be the instrument of the gospel's advancement." The best preaching has been called, "logic set on fire." "A new spirit always means a new tongue."

The speaking with "other tongues" has been described as "a sudden and powerful inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by which the disciples uttered not of their minds, but as mouthpieces of the Spirit, the praises of God in various languages, hitherto, and possibly at the time unknown to them. This miracle was meant to foreshadow the universal progress of the new faith and its message for all mankind, without distinction of nation, position or age. Pentecost is the reversal of Babel."

**Some Effects of the Presence of this Power.**—The first effect was upon the disciples themselves. From timid men they became exceedingly bold in the presentation of their cause. They had to speak to a multitude of people who had a short time before cried out for the death of their Master and Lord.

The second effect was upon the multitude. They were "confounded" and "amazed," they " marvelled " (Acts 2 : 6, 7). Their interest was aroused to the highest point when every man heard the disciples speaking "in his own language." There is no better time to present the truth to men than when they themselves are roused to the highest point of interest in regard to it. Peter spoke to a highly interested audience.

The third effect. Three thousand souls (Acts 2 : 41) were converted.

The picture of the state of the early church given in Acts

2: 42-47 is certainly a beautiful one. Here is peace, joy and harmony in the faith in Christ.

### THE TEACHING

We can judge very fairly of the teaching in this period of the church by the recorded speeches of Peter (Acts 2: 14-40) on the day of Pentecost; at the time of the healing of the lame man at the Beautiful gate of the Temple (Acts 3: 6-26); before Annas, the high priest and the rulers, elders and scribes (Acts 4: 5-12); of Peter and John (Acts 4: 15, 19, 20); of Peter and the other Apostles (Acts 5: 18, 25, 29-32); and of Stephen, the deacon (Acts 6: 8, 13-15; 7: 1-56).

**The Substance.**—The essential things taught by the apostles lie upon the surface. What they said was not hard to understand. They came with no obscure or abstruse doctrine. They were to be "witnesses" of those things which they had seen and heard. They were moved upon by the Holy Spirit to tell their story of Jesus Christ in the most effective way, to reach men's hearts.

It is hardly to be supposed that we have the speeches of the apostles recorded in full, in fact in Peter's speech at the day of Pentecost we are distinctly told that "with many other words did he testify and exhort" (Acts 2: 40).

There is also a certain progress in the teaching.

1. The joining of the old dispensation with the new. "Peter presented the gospel as the fulfillment of prophecy and the completion of the covenant made by the fathers. He called upon his hearers to repent of their sins, to believe in Jesus as the Messiah who could forgive their sins and set them free from sin, and to be baptized into this faith thus outwardly joining together as a communion of the Messiah; and he promised as the result, the gift of the Holy Spirit, whose wonder-working presence had been shown to them" (Acts 2: 14-40).

2. The supremacy of Christ and the necessity for repentance, on the part of men, and forgiveness of sin through

Him alone, are more and more earnestly set forth. "Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3 : 19). "Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4 : 12). This teaching is very manifest in the speech of Peter after he healed the lame man, at the Beautiful gate (Acts 3 : 12-26).

Because of the strengthening testimony of the apostles, along this line (Acts 4 : 9-12 ; 5 : 29-31), great opposition arose on the part of the Jews (Acts 4 : 1-4). The Sadducees were especially set against them because they "preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead" and caused them to be put in prison. The climax of the antagonism came, however, when Stephen, the deacon, declared "that the new church was not a modification of Judaism but a new order" (Acts 6 : 8-15 ; 7 : 1-56). The scribes taught that the Mosaic Law provided the means of justification for men and a title to eternal life. The disciples of Jesus taught that the law could not do this, but that the death of Jesus procured eternal life for men, that His resurrection originated it, and that confidence in Him secured it. The result was not only that a multitude believed but that there arose a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem (Acts 8 : 1).

**The Manner.**—First, of teaching and witnessing on the part of the apostles was with a profound conviction of the truth of what they declared (Acts 4 : 19, 20 ; 5 : 28-31), with great enthusiasm and boldness (Acts 4 : 13, 31). Second, of receiving the truth by those who heard it. By some it was received, as it is always, when the truth is preached, with grateful hearts, and by others it was rejected.

## THE ORGANIZATION

The form of the organization of the church, shown in the first seven chapters of The Acts, is of a very simple

kind, but we are left in no doubt in regard to the firm basis of belief on which it rests.

**The Head of the Church** is Jesus Christ. It is in His name that the apostles preach; it is in His name that they offer remission of sins—upon repentance; it is in His name that believers are received into the church; it is for bearing His name that they are persecuted (Acts 2: 38; 3: 16; 4: 10, 12).

**The Voluntary Character.**—No one allied himself with this church who did not desire to do so and because of his conviction of—and acceptance of—the truth in Jesus Christ. Hence the organization consisted of those who were profoundly impressed with the preaching of the new way—and walked in it (Acts 2: 41).

**The Ordinances.**—In the picture of the early church given in The Acts, immediately after the close of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, it is shown that "they who gladly received his (Peter's) word were baptized . . . and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2: 41, 42).

In this statement there are five things asserted, two of which are that, at this beginning stage, the church at once took up the observance of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**The Doctrine and Prayers.**—Referring again to Acts 2: 41, 42 it is here stated that "they—the disciples—continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine . . . and in prayers."

The apostles' doctrine was the supremacy and all-sufficiency of Christ.

Prayer to God was much resorted to by the early believers. They found it an absolute necessity for them in the difficulties, which hedged them in. An example of the prayers of the church is given in Acts 4: 24-30 where when the members had prayed earnestly for the manifestation of God's presence, "the place was shaken where they were assembled



together and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4 : 31, 33).

**The Social Aspect.**—"And all that believed were together and had all things common" (Acts 2 : 44). "And they continued daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2 : 46). It is doubtful if the world has ever witnessed such a perfect social estate. It was brought about by no passionate appeal against the inequalities in the lives of men or a forced communism, but believers in one Lord and Saviour had had their hearts so touched by His love that the evil and selfishness in them were purged away. If the social conditions of the present day are ever to be improved, the improvement must come through a church as devoted to its Lord as this early church. That the Christian community of goods here spoken of was purely voluntary and not required or demanded is shown by the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5 : 3, 4)—whom Peter tells it was in their own power to give or not to give—and in the case of Barnabas, who is specially commended, and yet there is no intimation that he sold everything. The point is that where there was any lack it was made up and to any in need ample help was given. Here was one great loving family in Christ. The principle underlying this Christian community of goods is "that all possessing goods and industries are to be consecrated to God in the service of humanity (Matthew 25 : 14-30 ; Luke 13 : 6-9). Christian love and Christian principles are to abolish poverty and want and to spread the gospel over the earth, and we are to live daily according to the brotherly principle exemplified in this early church, where the poor man knew no shame, the rich no haughtiness."

**The First Case of Discipline** was forced upon the church by a flagrant instance of deliberate lying (Acts 5 : 1-11), showing how evil began very early to attempt to enter into the church.

**The Election of the First Deacons.**—We are told in

the gospels how the apostles were chosen. We are told in the sixth chapter of Acts (vs. 1-6) how the deacons were chosen and ordained to their work. In regard to the other officers of the church which we find elsewhere mentioned we have no account—with the exception of the missionaries (Acts 13 : 1-4)—of how they were chosen. The writers of the New Testament seem to be concerned chiefly in showing the great foundation upon which the church was to rest rather than the particular form or forms it took or should take on this foundation.

The occasion of the election of the seven deacons was the murmuring of "the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." There may have been some truth in this charge. At any rate the apostles did not attempt, themselves, to settle the right or wrong of the matter, but called the multitude of disciples together and left the matter with them to choose men to remedy the wrong, if any. We have here the direct appeal to the church as a whole to settle a matter in dispute and it is very significant of the way things were carried on. After the seven deacons were chosen they were consecrated to their work by the laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 6 : 6).

The Grecians mentioned here, were "true Jews from foreign lands, who spoke Greek, used the Greek instead of the Hebrew Bible, and whose mode of life and thinking was Grecised. The Hebrews were the pure Jews who not necessarily residing in Palestine, still used the Hebrew Scriptures and spoke the dialect of the sacred tongue then current; there was a natural jealousy between these two parties."

Three qualifications were required in the deacons to be chosen : 1. "Of honest report," men with goodness that makes itself manifest. 2. "Full of the Holy Ghost," men who are thoroughly religious. 3. Wisdom, men of prudence and good sense (Acts 6 : 3). How well these first deacons filled their office, not only in serving tables but in preaching

the gospel, is shown by their record, especially in the cases of Stephen and Philip.

**Bishops, Elders and Other Officers.**—In two instances Paul gives a list of the chief persons in the church (1 Corinthians 12 : 28 ; Ephesians 4 : 11) but the exact nature of the offices held by some of them has not been quite made plain. In the case of elders and bishops "the difference of name may point to some difference of origin or function ; but in the New Testament—and Clement—the terms are more or less equivalent. Thus the Elders of Ephesus are reminded (Acts 20 : 28) that they are bishops. So, too, we find sundry bishops in the single church of Philippi. In the pastoral Epistles Timothy appoints bishops and deacons, Titus elders and deacons, though (1 Timothy 5 : 17) Timothy also has elders under him. The qualifications also of a bishop as laid down for Timothy are practically those of the elder as described to Titus and equally point to ministerial duties in contrast to what we call episcopal" (Church Government, Hastings' Bible Dictionary). In regard to the offices held by Timothy and Titus they were evidently of a temporary nature as both 2 Timothy and Titus are letters of recall from their mission (2 Timothy 4 : 9 ; Titus 3 : 12). It is quite evident that the primitive church was quite simply organized and officered.

Persecution began as soon as it was fairly understood that the apostles were preaching the supremacy of Jesus Christ (Acts 4 : 2, 3 ; 5 : 17, 18, 28 ; 7 : 56-58).

**The Growth** of the church was quick and strong. The numbers of believers increased very rapidly. The day of Pentecost saw 3,000 conversions (Acts 2 : 41). In the fourth chapter and fourth verse of Acts the number has increased to 5,000. Again "multitudes" of converts are spoken of (Acts 5 : 14) and that "a great company of priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6 : 7).

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ACTIVITIES

**The Field**—while it is the world—up to the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7 : 59, 60) was Jerusalem. While the area of preaching of the apostles and disciples was thus seemingly limited—for about five years—in reality it was not limited, for the Jews, who were constantly coming to Jerusalem (Acts 2 : 8-12) from every quarter of the Roman empire, must have carried back the glad news to their distant homes of the wonderful things in regard to the Christ, which were being preached in the Holy City. Thus the way was being prepared for a further rapid spread of the gospel.

**The Equipment.**—The church at this time had no buildings, none of the New Testament writings were in existence, but it did have men who had walked and talked with Jesus Christ, who had been baptized with the Holy Ghost and who were thoroughly alive to the great mission before them.

**The Help of the Holy Spirit.**—Nothing was done in presenting Christ to the multitude until the descent of the Holy Spirit. The miraculous (Acts 3 : 1-16; 4 : 31; 5 : 12, 15, 16) or supernatural element in these first chapters of the Acts cannot be ignored or eliminated without doing violence to the narrative. This element is part of the historical record and is to be treated as such; it need not be considered as contrary to law, but may be by a law of God which we do not as yet understand, but of which we have the marvellous record.

The apostles and disciples are inspired and encouraged to do their great work through the Holy Spirit.

**The Joy.**—There was great rejoicing, on the part of the apostles, in preaching and in persecution (Acts 5 : 41), and gladness on the part of the multitude who received their message (Acts 2 : 46).

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QUESTIONS

What can be said of the beginning of the Christian church? What of the first candidates for membership? The first sermon? The first form of prayer? The first missionaries? The two sacraments? The policy? What is the significance of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit? What was the general preparation for this baptism? The immediate preparation? What can be said of the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit? What is the descent of the Holy Spirit? Give some effects of the presence of this power. What can be said of the teaching of the church? The substance? The manner? What can be said of the organization of the church? The Head of the church? The voluntary character? The ordinances? The doctrine and prayers? The social aspect? The first case of discipline? The election of the first deacons? The persecution? The growth? What can be said of the work of the church? The field? The equipment? The help of the Holy Spirit? The joy?

## STUDY II

### THE CHURCH IN ANTIOCH

#### JERUSALEM TO ANTIOCH

FROM the first—and Jewish—great centre of Christianity in Jerusalem to the second—and Gentile—centre in Antioch there were a number of important steps (Acts 8 : 1-12 : 25).

Time. About 35-46 A. D.

**The Scattering Abroad of the Members of the Jerusalem Church** (Acts 8 : 1-4).—This dispersion, which led to such large results, took place between five and six years (35 or 36 A. D.) after the descent of the Holy Spirit at the day of Pentecost and the formal organization of the Jerusalem church.

The immediate cause was the persecution which arose after the martyrdom of Stephen. This was an exclusively Jewish matter. Undoubtedly the leaders of the Jews took advantage of the unsettled state of the Roman empire at this time—and the summons, to Rome, of Pilate to meet the charges against him—to press their case against the Christians. The searching nature and merciless severity of this persecution are seen in the case of Saul who made “havoc of the church, entering into every house and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8 : 3). “No man’s house was safe from the persecutor.” The Christian church was laid waste.

While the immediate effect of the activity of the enemies of the church seemed very bad, yet in reality it was a blessing and marked a new epoch in the extension of the gospel. The great effort put forth to stamp out the new religion caused it to be spread abroad and to increase with wonderful rapidity. “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel” (Acts 8 : 4) “and they



were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8 : 1). The way for this new campaign had been prepared for by Jesus Christ, when, in bodily form He passed through this territory. It may seem strange that the apostles remained in Jerusalem while the deacons were compelled to flee, yet the deacons had lately come very largely and quickly into the public view by their intense earnestness and zeal in the new cause and they, after Stephen's speech and martyrdom, were doubtless singled out as special subjects of persecution.

The men who had been selected by the church, like Stephen and Philip, to perform a social service for the new community (Acts 6 : 2, 3, 5) we now find in the forefront of the new preaching cause of Christ (Acts 6 : 8-15 ; 8 : 5, 6, 26, 40). This shows, for one thing, that the Spirit would not have men seek only the social welfare of their fellow men, but also the higher spiritual good. Social good to the individual or community always follows spiritual regeneration, but social elevation alone does not always bring in spiritual good.

**The Organization of the Church in Samaria** (Acts 8 : 5-25).—Possibly we should read in Acts 8 : 5 that "Philip went down to a—rather than the—city of Samaria" in which case the city might be Sychar or Shechem, but the matter of the particular locality is unimportant as the gospel was preached at this time in many places in Samaria (Acts 8 : 25).

This region was the first district into which the word was carried beyond the immediate Jewish pale. It is interesting to note that while fleeing from persecution the disciples did not hide, but proclaimed everywhere their message.

The cause of the organization of the church in Samaria was the preaching of Christ.

The effect was that the people gave heed to what they heard. There were numbers of manifestations of divine power in the casting out of unclean spirits and the healing of the sick.

The one spurious convert mentioned is Simon Magus (Acts 8 : 9-13, 18-24) and he has received large attention from writers, upon this period, as he is the type of a man who in all ages has sought to make gain out of the church by joining it as a member, and because he is also a typical representative of "the travelling impostors who swarmed over Greece and Rome, at this time, pretending to magical powers derived from the spirit world ; they were readers of the stars, interpreters of dreams, fortune-tellers, medicine men—in brief they exercised the same arts as the modern fortune-teller and by much the same methods." Philip in his preaching seems to have paid little or no attention to Simon but the falling away of the multitude from the latter led him to pretend a conversion and to seek to buy the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 8 : 18, 19).

The chief effort of Philip was to convince men of their sins, lead them to repentance, point them to their Saviour and reconcile them to God ; he endeavoured to do good to men in their bodies and souls. Simon sought to do wonders that he might attach the people to himself and to get large money by working upon their credulity and "giving out that himself was some great one." There is the same contrast between the false and the true to-day.

So great was the work in Samaria that when the apostles heard of it in Jerusalem they sent unto them Peter and John (Acts 8 : 14), "Who when they were come down prayed that they might receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8 : 15-17). It is to be noted that now, as at the beginning, the Holy Ghost is unceasingly active in building up the church. The apostles taught that it was not only necessary to turn from sin to righteousness but it was also necessary to be born into the kingdom by a divine power, as Jesus had taught before them (John 3 : 5-8).

**The Mission to Ethiopia (Acts 8 : 26-40).**—This is the Greek and Roman word for the Hebrew name Cush. In its widest significance it included Nubia, Sennar, Kordofan and Northern Abyssinia, but in its more limited

application it included only that portion of territory from the junction of the White and Blue branches of the Nile to the south border of Egypt and known as the kingdom of Meroe. The name Candace, mentioned as queen of the Ethiopians in the narrative, is a dynastic title.

In the establishment of this mission the course of events is plainly marked out. The divine element comes to the front in the speaking to Philip by an angel of the Lord. He is told to go to the "South unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza." Obeying the divine command he meets the treasurer of the queen of Ethiopia who reading from the Old Testament, a prophecy concerning Christ, asks an explanation of it from Philip. This gives Philip an opportunity to present the crucified and risen Christ. The eunuch believes, is baptized and proceeds on his way carrying the gospel to his country. Here the curtain shuts down, but we know this much that ever since that time Abyssinia has been, and now is, a Christian kingdom.

In this brief narrative we get a glimpse of how the church was enlarging her borders in these early days of primitive Christianity.

**The Conversion of Saul** (Acts 9: 1-22).—This is another epoch making event. The arch persecutor who "made havoc of the church" now becomes its chief advocate.

The infant church had good cause to remember Saul. He took care of the clothes of the witnesses who killed Stephen (Acts 7: 58) and he left no stone unturned to drive the believers in Christ out of Jerusalem. In carrying his persecuting zeal to Damascus he must have been informed of a somewhat considerable body of Christians in that city, which was finely situated and had a large population. We have no account of how the gospel was carried to Damascus.

Saul was born in the university town of Tarsus in Cilicia, but at the proper age he was sent to Jerusalem to study the law under the celebrated Jewish teacher Gamaliel. He had a singularly acute mind combined with a boundless enthusiasm for the cause which he espoused.

It was on the way to Damascus that his conversion took place, when his mind was full of plans to put an end to Christianity. This marvellous event, which in the changes it has wrought in the world is greater than any decisive battle ever fought between nations, is related in very few words (Acts 9: 1-8). It is very evident that, after he had fallen to the earth from the effect of a blinding light, his mind was perfectly clear and he understood what was taking place for he asks the question, "Who art thou, Lord?" He shows here the character of a man who is perfectly collected and cool in his mind under all circumstances. The Lord whom he persecuted convinced him that he was wrong in his attack upon His church and won him to Himself. His beliefs and his whole life plan, were in consequence of his conversion, radically changed. Besides the report by Luke of his conversion, in Acts 9: 1-8, Paul gives two other accounts, one to the Jews in the Temple court (Acts 22: 6-11) and the other before Agrippa at Cæsarea (Acts 26: 12-20). He stoutly maintains in his Epistle to the Galatians that he received (Galatians 1: 11, 12, 8-24) his revelation of the gospel from Christ. It was the real appearance of the risen Christ to Paul which made him a Christian, Christianity's most efficient missionary and next to Christ, its greatest thinker, preacher and teacher.

Paul at once began to preach Christ in the synagogues that "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9: 20), but he found now that the Jews, while they were confounded and amazed, sought to kill him (Acts 9: 21-25), and when he had escaped and had come to Jerusalem the disciples were afraid of him (Acts 9: 26-30), so he returns to Tarsus.

From this time 35 or 36 A. D. until Barnabas seeks him to take up the work in Antioch (Acts 11: 25), in 42 or 43 A. D. Paul dwells in comparative obscurity, but God is really preparing him for his great missionary work. In Galatians (1: 17-24) he declares that these years of retirement were spent in Arabia Syria and Cilicia.

**Peaceful Times (Acts 9: 31-43).—**"Then had the

churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied."

After the conversion of Saul the persecution doubtless soon burned itself out. There were few men with his fiery zeal to keep it alive. Then too the Jews soon had large troubles of their own which gave them little time to keep up the persecution against the Christians. When Caius Cæsar Caligula became Emperor of Rome in 37 A. D. he claimed that divine honors should be paid to him. He commanded that his statue be set up in the Temple at Jerusalem with this inscription, "Caius the New Incarnation of Jupiter." When this command became known to the Jews they assembled in a vast throng before the palace of the Roman proconsul and, uttering wild and piteous cries, declared they would die rather than have this sacrilege committed. The most however that the Jews could accomplish was to have the Temple remain unoccupied by the statue, but many altars, where divine honors were paid to the emperor, were erected outside its gates. Troublous times continued for the Jews until January 24th, 41 A. D., when Caligula was murdered.

During these few years of freedom from persecution the church had time not only to engage in new work, but to strengthen that which had already been accomplished. We have an account in Acts 9: 32-44 of how one Apostle (Peter) was occupied during this time in passing through "all quarters" and some things that he did at Lydda, Saron and Joppa. Doubtless the other workers were similarly occupied.

**The Vision of Peter** and the circumstances attending it (Acts 10: 9-16, 1-48; 11: 1-18).

The time had come when Gentiles were to be received into the church and it was to be broadened from a Jewish to a universal church. The Gentiles at this time were forbidden to enter the most sacred places of the Jewish worship. The Jews by the Mosaic law were interdicted from articles

of food in common use by the Gentiles. There were other barriers.

Was it necessary or not for a Gentile to become a Jew before he became a Christian? This was shortly to become a burning question.

Peter is taught, by his vision of the great sheet let down full of all manner of four footed beasts and creeping things which he is to use in disregard of the Levitical law (Leviticus 11 : 2-25), that a new era is about to dawn. The teaching is that God, who made the old law, has replaced it with a new law and that the wall of partition is broken down between Jew and Gentile. The story is here told of Cornelius who seeks instruction in the Christian way at the hands of Peter. The apostle goes to Cornelius in Cæsarea, after seeing his vision, and says "of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." Then he presents Christ as the chosen of God (Acts x : 34-48), and baptizes and receives into the church not only Cornelius, but many of his friends, who accepted Christ as their Saviour.

When Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was remonstrated with by the Jewish Christians for eating with Gentiles, but when he had told them of the whole matter, "They held their peace and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11 : 18, 1-18).

### THE CITY AND THE WORK

The church was growing in all directions. Judea, Samaria, Gaza, Ethiopia, Azotus, Cæsarea, Damascus, Tarsus, Lydda, Joppa, Phenice, and Cyprus are some of the regions and places where Christ found many followers in the first twelve years after His resurrection.

At length what was to be the second great centre of Christianity, and from which were to go forth the most



momentous influences, the city of Antioch is reached (Acts 11 : 19-30).

**The Importance of this City.**—Antioch was the third city in population (500,000) and influence in the Roman Empire, ranking next to Rome and Alexandria. Seleucus Nicator, Alexander's greatest general, built the city in 300 B. C., and gave to it his father's name, Antiochus. It was the capital of Syria, at the time Christianity entered its gates. It was situated about 300 miles north of Jerusalem, on the Orontes River, with Selucia as its seaport at the mouth of the river and sixteen miles distant. It traded with all parts of the world; caravans coming to it even from India and Persia; its ships sailed to every seaport on the Mediterranean sea. This trade brought great gain to the city. The population was of all kinds and all nationalities, Romans, Greeks, Syrians, Jews, freemen, slaves, the ignorant and the cultured. It was a centre of art and literature. "The principal street traversed the entire length of the city from east to west, a distance of about four miles, having four parallel rows of columns, forming a broad road in the middle, open to the sky, and on each side a narrow covered way or portico. The road in the middle was laid with granite in the time of Antoninus Pius."

In morals, so bad were they, that the Roman writer Juvenal complains that Antioch's dissipation and corruption had corrupted even Rome's corruption. About four miles from the city, was the famous pleasure grounds of Daphne, where was a temple dedicated to Apollo. Here "under the climate of Syria and the wealthy patronage of Rome, all that was beautiful in nature and art had created a sanctuary for a perpetual festival of vice. The name of Daphne became proverbial for its luxurious festivals, unbridled debauchery and unnatural vices."

**The Founding of the First Gentile Church** (about 42 or 43 A. D.).—The narrative in Acts 11 : 19-21 turns back to Acts 8 : 1-4 and shows another route along which

the gospel was proclaimed by the disciples, who were scattered abroad upon the martyrdom of Stephen.

In this way we are told how the gospel came to Antioch and who were the organizers of the church. They were men of Cyprus—a large island about sixty miles from the coast of Palestine—and Cyrene—an important city on the north coast of Africa. These were undoubtedly Greek speaking Jews and they spoke to Grecians; this word as here used in the New Testament means the Greeks, that is Gentiles, and the contrast is marked between the nineteenth verse where the Jews only were addressed and the twentieth verse where the disciples turn to the Greeks or Gentiles. The addressing of the Gentiles was a decidedly new departure.

The substance of their preaching was the Lord Jesus. In this city of wealth, fashion, luxury and vice, it would seem as if there could be no common ground upon which the people could be touched by the message of the disciples, but "the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord" (21 vs.).

**The Visit of Barnabas** (Acts 11 : 22-24).—The tidings of the great success of the Christian workers at Antioch speedily reached Jerusalem. It was natural that the mother church should desire to know about the new church at Antioch, how it was founded and what was being taught, especially if it was reported that the gospel was being preached to the Gentiles. After the receiving of Cornelius (Acts 11 : 1-18) into the church by Peter, and the action upon it, there must have been some anxiety lest in Antioch there should be a division between Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles, for there were many Jews in the city and some doubtless were interested in the new movement. The differences, afterwards so manifest, between the Jew who accepted Christ as the Messiah and who still obeyed the law and the Gentile who accepted Christ as his Saviour and did not become a Jew and practice the law, had not yet reached the acute state.

In sending Barnabas to inquire into affairs, the church

at Jerusalem made a wise selection. He was a native of Cyprus, a Greek speaking Jew and was well acquainted in Antioch and had the confidence of the Jews in Jerusalem. He was likely, as a Levite, to be true to the Jewish religion. When he came to the new church it is recorded : 1. What he saw, "the grace of God." 2. What he felt, he "was glad." 3. What he did—"he exhorted them all with purpose of heart that they would cleave unto the Lord" (23 vs.). He recognized that the main thing was to have these new converts be loyal to Jesus Christ. His visit was a great help to the church (24 vs.)

**The Bringing in of Paul** (25, 26 vs.).—Very soon, with the increase of the work and the many open doors, Barnabas saw that more and very efficient aid must be secured if any work adequate to the size and importance of the city was to be accomplished. He then departed to Tarsus to seek Saul. A number of years had passed since the conversion of Saul and he had had no adequate place for the exercise of his remarkable gifts. Barnabas had introduced him to the apostles in Jerusalem, but they seemed with the disciples not to take to him (Acts 9 : 26-30). Now however his opportunity had come and Barnabas when he had found him brought him unto Antioch. It is evident from the narrative that a multitude of people were taught in the new way, for Barnabas and Saul continued for some time in the city. A year is mentioned, but it seems plain that they preached and taught after the expiration of this period.

Material aid was sent to Jerusalem by this young and vigorous church in a time of famine, showing that it very early exercised the benevolent spirit (Acts 11 : 27-30).

**The New Name** (26 vs.).—"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." It seems probable that this name was not assumed by the followers of Christ or given to them by the Jews, but that it was given to them by the inhabitants of Antioch because there was a necessity for a name for a community which was composed both of Jews

and Gentiles. Some scholars, however, assert that the new name was applied at first only to Gentiles who accepted Christ.

**The Number of Christians.**—We have no means of estimating the number of believers, save through the expressions, “a great number” and “much people” (twice repeated), but we can safely say from the power exerted by this city over the Christian world later on that these expressions are of great significance.

If Christianity was able to gain so strong a foothold as it did in Antioch and have such a mighty influence go forth from it that the city's ancient evil fame in morals is blotted out under its renown at the place where the disciples were first called Christians, and be known as the centre of a great missionary enterprise, we need not fear lest this faith shall not be able to solve any problems and conquer any set of adverse circumstances in any city where it is preached, with the zeal which animated Barnabas and Saul.

## RENEWED PERSECUTION

**The Martyrdom of James** (Acts 12: 1, 2).—The narrative now turns back to the state of the mother church. When the disciples were having such success in Antioch there was great trouble in Jerusalem.

The Jews, some time after the death of the Emperor Caligula in 41 A. D., turned their attention again to the rapidly increasing power of the Christian church. Herod Agrippa I—grandson of Herod the Great—had helped Claudius, the successor of Caligula, to become emperor. In return Herod Agrippa was made king by Claudius and had many favours showered upon him. Herod lived in Jerusalem and curried favour with the Jews in every way. It is this Herod who, desiring to please the Jews, put forth “his hands to afflict certain of the church and killed James, the brother of John, with the sword.” This took place in the spring of the year 44 A. D. We can well imagine the

stir that this act aroused in the Christian community, who had for some years enjoyed immunity from persecution.

**The Imprisonment of Peter** (Acts 12 : 3-19).—Herod Agrippa I evidently was following a shrewd plan to strike at the Christian leaders, first, and to put them out of the way. When he saw that the execution of James pleased the Jews he proceeded to take Peter also and put him in prison. To make sure of him he was bound with two chains to two soldiers, one on either side. The intention was to have him executed after Easter.

This was a crisis in the affairs of the church and prayer was made unceasing for the release of Peter. Prayer was the only weapon which could be used and so effective was it that Peter was released to the great joy of the disciples.

**The Death of the Persecutor, Herod Agrippa I** (Acts 12 : 20-23).—Within about a month after the death of James, the king went to a magnificent festival, held in honour of the Roman Emperor at Cæsarea. There before a vast throng he appeared “in all the pride of state in robes inwrought with silver thread. The time chosen was day-break so that the rising sun shining on this grand mantle lighted it into dazzling splendour.” When Herod made an oration and the people shouted, “It is the voice of a god and not of a man” he did not rebuke them but drank in the shallow flattery. Luke tells us that he was smitten, because he gave not God the glory, by the angel of the Lord, was eaten of worms and died.

**The Result of the Persecution.**—“The word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12 : 24). It is the same story repeated over and over again ; attacks upon the church only cause it to increase in numbers and power.

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QUESTIONS

Jerusalem to Antioch ; what were the important steps from the first to the second great centre of Christianity ? What can be said of the scattering abroad of the members of the Jerusalem church ? The organization of the church in Samaria ? The mission to Ethiopia ? The conversion of Saul ? Peaceful times ? The vision of Peter ? What can be said of the work in Antioch ? The importance of this city ? The founding of the church ? The visit of Barnabas ? The bringing in of Paul ? The new name ? The number of Christians ? What can be said of the renewed persecution ? The martyrdom of James ? The imprisonment of Peter ? The death of the persecutor ? The result of the persecution ?



## STUDY III

### THE CHURCH IN THE PROVINCES

#### CONDITIONS AND PROBLEMS

**Territorial Expansion.**—The church, from its vantage ground in Antioch and from the beginning of the first missionary journey of Paul (Acts 13 : 1-4), begins to find a wider field for its work and to take upon itself a universal character. It was now to carry the gospel, according to the command of its Lord, into all the world (Matthew 28 : 19 ; Acts 1 : 8). This movement is yet in progress.

Hitherto the church has ministered mostly to the Jews and to the Gentiles who have come more or less closely in contact with the Jews and whose dwelling places have not been at so very great distances from the city of Jerusalem and its splendid Temple. Now while still ministering to the Jews and those near to them it takes a long step forward in appealing to alien races. It is no longer possible to send Peter and John or a Barnabas from Jerusalem to visit the new churches, when they are organized, as was done when the churches in Samaria and Antioch and other places came into existence.

**Political and Religious State of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece.**—In order to understand primitive Christianity there must be some knowledge of the conditions which it had to meet when it began to aspire to be the first religious world power (see "The Letters to the Seven Churches," by Professor Ramsay). It is not possible to treat adequately in this book—from its limited scope—these conditions. But something may be said of the state of affairs in Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, which will show the difficult situations which Christianity had to meet

and conquer here and in other parts of the world. (For the conditions in Rome, see Study IV.) For while we have a certain knowledge of these regions and how the gospel came to them, in the Acts, yet there are other regions where the gospel was carried of which we know little of the how and the why of its establishment.

Politically, Asia Minor was unfavourable to the progress of Christian missions. While under Roman rule it was broken up into numerous communities varying greatly in civilization, in manners, language and religion, and ruled partly by Roman prefects and partly by petty kings and potentates. Some of the roads off from the finely kept Roman highways, were scarcely passable and what was worse some parts of the peninsular, to which the missionaries addressed themselves were overrun with bandits. They were as Paul says "in perils of robbers." There were some large and wealthy cities like Ephesus and Smyrna, with a population of about 200,000 inhabitants each, and Pergamos, with a population of over 100,000; while there were many languages spoken, the Greek was quite well understood by the people.

Religiously, it was given over entirely to idolatry. There was a mixture of the religions of the East and West. The one seemingly favourable feature was the presence of Jewish synagogues in the leading cities, but as soon as Paul's mission to proclaim Christ as the Messiah and Saviour to the Gentiles—without adherence to the levitical law—became known many of these synagogues became active centres of antagonism to the New Way.

In Macedonia and Greece the gospel preached by Paul came within the charmed circle of what was then the highest civilization. It tried its strength with the keenest philosophers and the most seductive fascinations of immorality masquerading under the guise of religion in the licentious rites of the heathen temples and groves.

**New Questions and Adjustments.**—Of necessity many new and perplexing questions arose for settlement (see Study VIII, the Church in Conflict). The state and society

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were full of idolatrous practices. To become a Christian was to be set apart from one's fellow men in many ways. Christianity was obliged to define its relations to the state, to Judaism, to polytheism, to philosophy, to society, to amusements and to the family. The bringing in of a new national god or a new national religion was ordinarily a matter of indifference to the people of the Roman Empire, "but gradually they began to realize that Christianity meant a social and religious revolution and that it did not mean to take its place alongside of the other religions, but to destroy them." It is hardly possible at this distance in time, to realize this revolutionary character of Christianity, in its beginning. It not only took the field against the worship of many gods and the open immorality which was part and parcel of polytheism, but it rejected uncompromisingly the worship of the dead Cæsars and the living Cæsar, which was a part of the religion of the Roman Empire. The Christians refused to worship the Roman Emperor as a god and "nearly all the encounters between individual Christians and the religious regulations of the empire resolved themselves into a trial for treason." The Christians believed and taught that, while inculcating obedience to all lawful authority, the honour paid to a monarch was one thing and the worship paid to God quite another. The effort of the church was to bring all men together under one Lord, who claimed their supreme allegiance, above that of the state. No such plan had ever before been contemplated by any religion to make itself universal. The disciples presented the gospel of God the Father Almighty, of His Son Jesus Christ and the resurrection, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit as all sufficient for men in all circumstances of life. "They believed that Christianity is salvation by faith, faith in God through Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son." For them to live was to live in Christ. They attacked the strongholds of the heathen faith in the big cities, like Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome itself, and made their power felt until, in time, they carried all before them.

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THE LEADERSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Significance of this leadership of the church into new and larger fields of work cannot be overestimated (Acts 13: 1-3). It is one of the great turning points in the history of Christianity. New men came to the front and a new and vigorous policy was inaugurated.

The initiative in this missionary movement, which had such mighty results, was not with the church, but the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 2).

**The Men and the Work.**—The church in Antioch at this time was large and flourishing. Ever since its foundation a few years before it had made great progress.

There were five notable men, prophets and teachers, in the church who were especially desirous to do the will of God and they fasted and prayed looking for divine guidance. The names of the men were Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manæn and Saul. It seems to be necessary when any great spiritual work is to be done for humanity that there should be a devout waiting upon God; it was so at the day of Pentecost.

The call by the Holy Spirit came to these men, "as they ministered to the Lord and fasted," to separate Barnabas and Saul for the new missionary work. The part of the church was to sanction the divine call by the laying on of hands and consecrating them to this service.

Antioch now becomes the great missionary centre of the church's activity. The missionaries go forth from this city and to it they return (Acts 13: 1, 4; 14: 26; 15: 35, 40, 41; 18: 22, 23). Paul takes that foremost place for which he has been prepared by his conversion and the call of the Spirit.

The time is about 47 A. D. when Paul is forty-five years old and in the fifth year of Claudius Cæsar, Emperor of Rome.

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CHURCHES FOUNDED BY PAUL

Our attention is now turned from the Jewish world, considered so largely in the first twelve chapters of the Acts, to the Gentile world and the efforts of Paul and his fellow helpers to bring it to Christ. The work is essentially that of city evangelization. The record of the three missionary journeys of Paul—for the purpose of preaching Christ and organizing churches—is found in Acts 13 : 1-21 : 17.

**The General Plan of Work** of Paul and his companion, or company, was, as soon as they entered a city, to find a lodging and then seek for work at tent-making. When the Sabbath came they would enter the Jewish synagogue and when the opportunity was given Paul would arise and begin to speak leading up through an Old Testament message to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah and closing with an exhortation to believe on Him. If he was asked to speak the next Sabbath day—as he frequently was and as by his speech he was recognized as a cultivated Jewish Rabbi—he would set forth Jesus Christ more plainly as the Saviour both of Jew and Gentile. This would be generally a signal for the Jews to contradict and oppose Paul, but some Jews would believe with a number of Gentiles. This would be the starting point of the Christian church in that city. The Jews however who remained untouched by Paul's message would look upon him as the destroyer of their religion and would persecute him and seek to have him expelled from the city. When the heathen thought their religion was in danger, as they frequently did, they would likewise persecute Paul. This experience was often repeated. But always there would be some who would be touched by the preaching of the Christ.

**The Message** which Paul bore to Jew and Gentile was the moving force of his work. The starting point was the memorable day when Jesus Christ appeared to him on his way to Damascus. Paul leaves us in no doubt as to how he regards Christ. He is to him the Son of God and the

divine Saviour of man (Ephesians 3: 9-21; Philippians 2: 9-11; Romans 9: 5). In regard to man he sets forth his position in the Epistle to the Romans; all have sinned, Jew and Gentile; all need a Saviour; Christ died for all; we are all one body in Him. There is no doubt and no hesitancy in delivering the message. He is a witness testifying to the glory of his divine Lord. To the rude mountaineers of Asia Minor, to the philosophers at Athens, to the Roman governors in Cæsarea, to the dwellers in Corinth and in Rome the message is always the same.

**The First Missionary Journey** (Acts 13: 1-14: 28) lasted from about 47-50 A. D. The number of miles travelled was about 1,400. The companions were Barnabas and John Mark. The places visited were Salamis and Paphos in Cyprus, Perga in Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium in Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe in Lycaonia. Upon the return journey the missionaries did not revisit Cyprus. Great was the rejoicing upon reaching Antioch and "they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."

**The Second Missionary Journey** (Acts 15: 36-18: 22).—In time this journey lasted from about 51-54 A. D. Paul's companion was Silas; Timotheus and Luke were with him some of the time. The number of miles travelled was about 3,200. This second journey is into—after revisiting most of the places of the first journey—entirely new provinces of Asia Minor and by the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 16: 6-11) Paul enters Macedonia and Achaia. This journey, in the influences it set in motion and in Paul's turning eastward, "is not only the greatest which Paul achieved but perhaps the most momentous in the history of the race." The itinerary was through Asia Minor revisiting the churches of the first missionary journey and then his company turned northward and went throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia. Afterwards they came to Mysia. In Europe, Paul visited Philippi, Thessalonica, Beerea, Athens and Corinth. The return was by way of



Ephesus, from thence he sailed to Cæsarea and after he had gone up and saluted the church he returned to Antioch.

The two epistles to the Thessalonians were written from Corinth during this journey.

**The Third Missionary Journey** (Acts 18 : 23-21 : 17).—In time this journey lasted from about 54-58 A. D. The number of miles was about 3,500. Starting from Antioch Paul "went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order strengthening all the disciples." He then came to Ephesus where he spent between two and three years. This great city—spoken of as the third great centre of Christianity—midway between the East and the West and to which all the roads in Asia Minor led, was a strategic point from which Paul carried on an aggressive campaign not only in the city, but in all the former places of his visitation. Such was the effect of Paul's preaching upon the idolatrous practices of the Ephesians that they burned their books of magical arts, to the amount of over \$31,000, in a big bonfire; and a riot was made by craftsmen who ministered to the idolatrous worship of Diana lest their occupation should be taken away from them. This shows how Christianity can affect a city. After visiting a number of cities in Macedonia and Achaia, he returned to Jerusalem by way of Troas, Miletus, Tyre and Cæsarea.

The two epistles to the Corinthians, Galatians and Romans were written during this journey.

In these three and other journeys, depicted in the narrative in the Acts and the Epistles, we can see the churches in the formative process. We note their difficulties and we sympathize with their joys and their triumphs. Their organizer and leader had a method in all that he did. The churches brought into being through his instrumentality were visited again and again and when he could not visit them he exhorted and encouraged them by his letters. Many of the members had come out of a gross heathenism where every passion had had full sway, and for them to turn to a moral and righteous life was no easy thing. It is a marvel that there

were so few abuses; in this we can see the power of the Holy Spirit.

### THE APOSTOLIC COUNCIL

**The Account** of this so called Apostolic Council is found in Acts 15 : 1-35 and is placed between the narratives of the first and second missionary journeys of Paul (compare Acts 21 : 17-25).

**The Cause.**—Again the question arose in the church, "Was it necessary for one when he became a Christian to also become a Jew, be circumcised and obey the provisions of the Levitical law?" Paul, while a Jew himself, taught that it was not necessary (Acts 13 : 38, 39; Romans 3; Galatians 2 : 16) and that supreme faith in Christ was all that was required. But "certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren and said, Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved." When the discussion grew warm and there seemed no prospect of settlement, the matter was referred to the apostles and elders for a council at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas and others were appointed to go to Jerusalem, as delegates, by the church in Antioch.

**The Decision.**—It is almost impossible now to realize how much hinged upon the decision which should be made. The Jews were separated from the Gentiles in many ways. There was a great social and religious barrier between them. Ceremonial observances did not permit the Jews to eat with the Gentiles. It is but fair to say that many of the Jews could not see how this barrier could be broken down. Likewise the Gentiles could not see why, when their salvation was through faith in Christ, they should be obliged to become Jews and be obedient to the law. After a full discussion of the matter it was decided in favour of the Gentiles and they were given their liberty in Christ. They were enjoined, however, to keep themselves from certain things (Acts 15 : 28, 29) which were the besetting temptations of those who so recently had come out of heathenism.

This question seemingly so amicably settled at this time was destined to come up again and again and hamper Paul (Acts 21 : 27, 28 ; Galatians 3 : 1-29) and others in their work, but nevertheless it was a great victory gained for all time. It gave a freedom and a power to the gospel message which it could not otherwise have had. After the taking of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by the Romans in 70 A. D. this question assumed less and less importance, but when the Emperor Hadrian had rebuilt Jerusalem and renamed it *Ælia Capitolina* and forbade any Jew to enter it (135 A. D.) it ceased to have any significance.

### THE WIDENING CIRCLE OF CHURCHES

**The Diffusion of the Gospel** and the establishment of churches throughout the provinces was first from one centre and then from another. The kingdom of God not only came with observation, as in the case of the Pauline churches, but without observation. Communication, along the splendid Roman roads and the ship routes, was easy to the farthest confines of the empire and men turning to Christ in one city, where they might stop on a journey, carried the good news with them to their homes. Converted soldiers, sailors, slaves, merchants, landholders and men and women in all ranks of life, had a hand in this good work, and in this way many new centres of Christian light and life would be established, which in turn would lead to others.

In this work the apostles, and those near them, did their important first foundation-laying, but the record of their subsequent labours is not so clear. We know, however, that John the beloved disciple was bishop of Ephesus and died there about 100 A. D. The church of Alexandria in Egypt, by an unvarying ecclesiastical tradition, was organized by Mark, the evangelist. Peter is said to have preached in Babylon and Rome ; Andrew in Scythia, Greece and Asia Minor ; James the elder in Jerusalem and Judea ; James, the less, in Palestine and Egypt ; Jude in Assyria and Persia ; Philip in Phrygia. Thomas is claimed by the Syrian Chris-

tians as the founder of their church and he perhaps also preached in Persia and India.

**In Asia** there were many churches of which we have an account, but no word as to their origin, besides those well known to us in the narrative in the Acts. In Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor the churches organized in the apostolic age continued for a long time to be great centres for the propagation of the New Way. We know that the gospel was preached far to the eastward, for by the middle of the second century we have notices of Christian communities in Edessa, in Mesopotamia, in Persia, in Media, in Bactria, in Parthia, in Armenia and in Arabia.

**In Europe.**—Paul, in his second missionary journey, crossed over to Europe and organized churches. Besides those in Macedonia and Achaia, there were many Christian communities in Italy and upon the Danube and the Rhine, in the Roman colonies. There were no more important churches in these early times than those of Gaul and Spain. It is probable that Paul visited the churches in Spain after his release from his first imprisonment. It is in dispute whether the church in Britain was founded in apostolic times or not.

**In Africa.**—We are told how in the Acts the gospel was carried to Ethiopia by the converted eunuch, who was baptized by Philip. Alexandria was a great centre of Christianity from which missionaries carried the gospel to all parts of Egypt. Many things combined to give this city the headship of the Grecian world. Here was a great Christian school of thought and many teachers who made it renowned. From this city the gospel undoubtedly was carried westward to Cyrene. The important church in Carthage, with many smaller churches around it, in proconsular Africa, may have had its beginning from the church in Rome.

Thus the then known world was encircled with Christian churches.

**The History** of the churches, after the narrative in the New Testament closes, we find in the writings of the able

Christian teachers who were raised up to carry on the good work. By means of these writings, through many years, we can witness the conflicts and triumphs of the churches. Each great Christian city had its competent and powerful defender of the faith; for when Christianity was claiming to be the universal religion, and superior to all others, its contentions by no means went unchallenged. Some of these great teachers were Clement and Justin Martyr of Rome, Clement and Origen of Alexandria, Irenæus of Lyons, Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage, and Eusebius of Cæsarea. The teaching of these men was carried on, especially in Alexandria, "in the midst of Pagans and philosophers, men of wide training and cultivated intellect. They were compelled to present Christianity in such a manner as should neither repel their opponents, nor give them an easy victory over ignorant assertions or futile anathemas." They successfully showed that Christianity did not shun the light of reason and was ready to meet all comers with a culture equal to their own.

We are also connected with the Apostolic age by such men as Ignatius who was head of the Antioch church as early as about 69 A. D., and who was martyred in Rome under the Emperor Trajan. As he went on his way from Antioch to Rome he writes farewell letters rejoicing in his approaching death (by wild beasts) for Christ. Again John the Apostle, was head of the church at Ephesus until about 100 A. D., when he died; at the same time, during the last five years of John's headship, his pupil Polycarp (martyred about 155 A. D.) was bishop of Smyrna. Papias (died about 163 A. D.) who was bishop of Hierapolis, was also a hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp. Papias was an able writer and he gives testimony in regard to the authorship and making of the gospels.

### NUMBER OF CONVERTS

**The Evidence.**—There is testimony both from the Christians and those opposed to Christianity that it multi-

plied its converts very rapidly in the first seventy years of its existence. On the day of Pentecost we are told that three thousand were converted and numbers of these converts were visitors from various parts of the Roman Empire. Throughout the Acts we are told of the extraordinary success of the gospel in many cities such as Antioch and Ephesus. Christ told His followers that He came to draw all men unto Himself and commissioned them to preach the gospel to all nations.

In heathen writers we find the great numbers which believed in Christ spoken of. Tacitus, in describing the Neronian persecution, which lasted from 64-68 A. D., speaks of the great multitude which believed in Christ at that time in Rome; a number large enough to call to them the attention of the Imperial authority. Within about twelve years after the death of John, at Ephesus, Pliny, the governor of the province of Bithynia asks the Emperor Trajan what he shall do about enforcing the law against the Christians. He says, that many of every rank and also of both sexes are called in danger and are likely to be so; and not only through the cities, but even through the villages and rural districts, the contagion of that superstition has spread. Yet there is little reason to suppose that the Christians were more numerous in Bithynia than in other provinces of Asia Minor at the time when Pliny was governor and when he wrote in 112 A. D. Tacitus and Pliny had no reason for exaggerating the case.

In Christian writers we find the same story. Later on, Justin Martyr of Rome declares that widely dispersed as is the Jewish race, yet there are nations into which no Jew has ever been; whereas there is not one single race of men, whether barbarians or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, among whom prayers and the giving of thanks are not offered through the name of the crucified Jesus. Clement of Alexandria says that the gospel was diffused over the whole world among Greeks and barbarians alike, nation by nation and village by village. Still later, Tertullian of



Carthage in the famous passage in the Apologeticus says, "Their outcry is that the state is besieged ; that Christians are in the fields, the fortresses, the islands ; they lament as a dire calamity that every sex, age, condition and even rank, is going over to this profession."<sup>1</sup>

### QUESTIONS

The church in the provinces ; what can be said of the conditions and problems? What was the political and religious state of Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece? What can be said of the new questions and adjustments? What can be said of the leadership of the Holy Spirit? Its significance? The men and the work? What can be said of the churches founded by Paul? The message? The first, second and third missionary journeys? What can be said of the Apostolic Council? The account? The cause? The decision? What can be said of the widening circle of the churches? The diffusion of the gospel? In Asia? In Europe? In Africa? The history? What can be said of the number of converts?

<sup>1</sup>For the times at which—and the circumstances in which—the above statements were made and a fuller treatment of the whole matter—with additional statements—see Study X, section, Rapid Growth.

## STUDY IV

### THE CHURCH IN ROME

#### THE CHURCH

WE now come to the church in the capital city of the great Roman Empire.

**When Organized.**—It is uncertain when and by whom this church was founded. It is supposed that "strangers of Rome" (Acts 2 : 10), who were present at the great manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost in 30 A. D., carried back with them the good news and organized the first Christian community.

It was certainly not founded by Peter or by Paul who, in his Epistle to the Romans before he visited the church speaks of its faith as being well known throughout the whole world (Romans 1 : 8). Paul also speaks in the same Epistle (Romans 16 : 7) of dwellers in Rome, "who also were in Christ before me." This Epistle was written in 58 A. D., from Corinth, and Paul reached Rome in 61 A. D. Had Peter founded the church in Rome or been in the city when Paul wrote Romans, or Luke wrote Acts 28 : 14-31, the fact would no doubt have been mentioned.

Many scholars, however, accept the tradition as being true to the fact, that Peter was in Rome just before and during the Neronian persecution (64-68 A. D.). It is also claimed by some that Peter was martyred in Rome about the same time as Paul during the latter part of the Neronian persecution; others assert that Peter did not suffer martyrdom until some time later. It is also claimed that Peter wrote his first Epistle from Rome, using Babylon (1 Peter 5 : 13) as the mystical name for Rome.

**Composition and Meeting Places.**—In the time of Paul there were about 60,000 Jews in Rome. This colony

was founded by the captive Jews whom the Roman general Pompey sent to the Imperial city when he took Jerusalem in 63 B. C. It was doubtless the chief men of the descendants of this colony whom Paul called together when he first came to the city (Acts 28 : 17). There was here ample material upon which the Gospel could work.

The church was composed of both Jews and Gentiles, for Paul in his Epistle addresses both classes (Romans 9 : 24 ; 11 : 13 ; 1 : 16 ; 1 : 13 ; 2 : 17 ; 7 : 1 ; 4 : 1).

The church probably lacked, at this time, a unified organization, although it might have had many members. Paul is careful not to address it as one (Romans 1 : 7). "Christianity seems to have appeared in the capital of the world in the form of separate circles, so called house churches" (Romans 16 : 5). Yet in their faith they were one as Paul says, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all" (Romans 1 : 8).

**Paul's Letter to the Roman Christians.**—When the Great Apostle was in Ephesus (Acts 19 : 21) during his third missionary journey he declared his intention of visiting Rome. So strong was this determination that when he arrived in Corinth he wrote his now famous Epistle. Evidently Paul had first-hand information of the state of affairs in the Imperial city ; he was doubtless constantly meeting many men who were its citizens. Besides he had many friends there (Romans 16). In this letter we find no assumption of authority. He deems it no more than right that he should address them on the subject of his visit and state why and how he was coming (Romans 1 : 1-13 ; 15 : 15-32). There are many ways in which he might have addressed the Christians in Rome but he chose to write what he had to say under two heads :

1. Doctrinal (Romans 1-11). He here puts in shape the result of his thinking upon and preaching Christ for over twenty years, since his conversion, and it is all summed up in the great theme, Justification through faith in Jesus Christ for the Jew and the Gentile.

2. Practical (Romans 12: 1-15: 14). The Christian's duty to the church and his conduct outside the church (ch. 12), the Christian's duty to the state and society (ch. 13), and the Christian's toleration and supreme trust in Christ (chs. 14: 1-15: 14).

In this letter we get an insight into the earnestness and zeal of the Roman Christians, for a company of people is marked by the character of the letters which it receives as by one who writes them. In the practical part we also notice the care which they are exhorted to take of their moral welfare and not to make themselves obnoxious to the Roman government.

Luke tells us, that Paul dwelt, guarded by a soldier, for two years (61-63 A. D.) in his own hired house in Rome and received all that came in unto him (Acts 28: 16, 30). Of the result of that two years' labour, Paul declares that it was to the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1: 12-20) and that there were many converts in the palace (Philippians 4: 22) and other places. It is evident that Christianity made great progress in the city at this time. Five Epistles were written by Paul in Rome: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians and Second Timothy.

**Position and Influence.**—It is not strange that a church in any big city should have a certain power and authority from its situation, especially so when it is itself strong.

When then the church in the capital city of the Roman Empire began to grow rapidly in membership it easily took a leading place in the Christian councils. But it should be remembered also that this foremost position was not one exclusively gained through a large membership or from a desire for ecclesiastical control or lordship over the churches, but because of the purity of its faith, the zeal in bringing men and women to Christ and the willingness to suffer in His cause, even to the death. "It is astonishing what Christianity, in a relatively short time, made out of motley and confused heathen groups; earnest men working out

their salvation with fear and trembling, saints fully aware of the moral tasks of their consecration.”<sup>1</sup>

### THE CITY AND THE EMPIRE

In order to fully appreciate the difficult task of the church, in these times, it is necessary to know something of the material with which it worked and its environment.

**The City of Rome** was the fourth centre in the progress of Christianity eastward, after Jerusalem, Antioch and Ephesus, but the power which dominated the world had its seat here. It is not strange that a man like Paul should desire to see Rome and turn that power to Christ. He believed and taught that Christ was supreme over all and that all men should believe in and obey Him. He had a large plan, no less than the subjugation of the whole Roman world to his Lord.

The population, in the time of Paul, by a conservative estimate was reckoned at 1,500,000. Many rate it at a much higher figure; one-half of this number were slaves and a good share of the remainder were paupers dependent upon the largess of the state; there was no middle class; the nobility and the wealthy class consisted of those of whose extravagant luxury we hear so much. The city drew all sorts of people to it and of all nationalities. “The rhetorician from Asia, the Greek philosopher, the Chaldean astrologer, the Egyptian magician, the begging priest of Isis all jostled each other here in the struggle for existence.”

The outward appearance. It was impressive by reason of its great extent and not by either a distinctive beauty or grandeur. The streets were many of them narrow, dirty and winding and flanked by tall, densely crowded lodging houses. The movement begun by Augustus to make Rome the worthy capital of the empire led to the building of many palatial mansions, ornate temples and large basilicas for the transaction of business.

<sup>1</sup> For forms and order of worship and officers, see Study VI.

**The Empire.**—Augustus—who became sole ruler in 31 B. C. and reigned until 14 B. C.—left the empire bounded by “the Rhine and the Danube, the Euphrates, the African desert, the Atlantic and the North Sea. These limits were not seriously exceeded until Trajan’s time except the conquest of Britain was begun by Claudius in 43 A. D. and was finished, as far as it was ever finished, by the recall of Agricola in 85 A. D.”

The population was about “120,000,000, of which 60,000,000 were slaves, 40,000,000 were tributaries and freedmen and only about 20,000,000 were citizens,” of which number it is asserted by some authorities that only about 4,000,000 were citizens in full.

There was a vast variety of political conditions. Some cities were free and others had no voice in their own taxation. Some provinces were governed by senatorial proconsuls and proprætors and other regions had client kings. Broadly speaking, the eastern half was Greek, the western Latin. Greek was in most places the language of culture and commerce, although many languages and dialects were spoken. The Empire was never a solid nation. Rome was the connecting link between the old civilization and the new, between the heathen city states of the ancient world and the Christian nations of the modern.

**Helps in the Progress of the Church.**—The empire—without intending it—contributed largely to the success of the church through external and internal conditions of which great advantage was taken by its early promoters.

External conditions: 1. The comparative realization of a world state and a political unity of many nations under one government.

2. A general peace and a respect for law and order.
3. The military roads extending to the farthest confines of the Empire, making travel easy.
4. International traffic.
5. The general use of the Greek language, which had



been brought about by the Hellenizing of the East and partly of the West, since the conquests of Alexander.

6. "The decomposition of ancient society into a democracy."

This state of affairs made a highway for Christianity which aimed to be the world-religion and to embrace all nations, peoples and languages in its provisions.

Internal conditions :

1. The old religions and philosophies were wearing out. When Christianity attacked the polytheistic state religion it found it already seriously weakened.

2. There was a reawakening of the religious sense. Men were longing for something better in religion and some one who would guide them to the understanding of God and a right worship of Him.

3. Stoicism on which many leaned for support amid the terrors and temptations of that awful epoch utterly failed to provide a remedy against the universal degradation. It aimed at cherishing an insensibility which gave no real comfort, and for which it offered no adequate motive.

**Obstacles in the Way of the Progress of the Church**—1. Political. As soon as the true aim of the new religion was understood all the power of the empire was exerted to crush it.

2. Religious. Christianity did not desire to become one of the religions and take its place in the Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses, with the other allowed religions, but it did propose to be the religion for the saving of all men ; hence it incurred a bitter enmity and persecution.

3. Moral. Christianity demanded of its followers moral purity in a world which had so degraded and debased the moral sense that it seemed almost lost. Seneca, the great Roman philosopher who lived in the time of Nero, gives a long list of revolting forms of iniquity which were openly practiced. He says, " All things are full of crimes and vices. There is a struggle to see who will excel in iniquity. In-

iquity has so free a course in public, it so dominates in all hearts, that innocence is not only rare, it does not exist at all." This description, and that of other writers, of the state of affairs in Rome confirms what Paul said in regard to the morals of the city in Romans 1: 21-32. Immorality was allowed as a part of the worship in certain temples of the Greeks and Romans. The great Plato had taught the Greeks in his contemplated "Ideal Republic" that a community of wives was one of the things to be desired, so blinded was he to the sacredness of the marriage tie. Socrates himself was so dull to a great moral truth that we find him advising an evil woman, Theodota, how she might best retain her friends. The moral abuses that arose from the holding of millions of slaves are too bad to be mentioned. The right of parents to destroy their young children, if they so chose, was conceded; both Aristotle and Plato had approved this right.

4. Inhuman amusements. The sufferings and death agonies of men and women were made subjects of sport. The Roman populace demanded realism when it was to be amused and what was done in the capital city was done in Ephesus, Antioch and other cities of the empire. There was a barbarous cruelty in the spectacles of the day. Mercy, pity and purity had fled in shame from men's hearts. "Art must know nothing of morality and must accept and rejoice in a so-called healthy animalism. Comedy must be actual shame, and tragedy actual bloodshed. When the play of Afranius, called the 'Conflagration,' was put upon the stage a house must be really burned and its furniture plundered. In the mime called 'Laureolus,' an actor must be really crucified and mangled by a bear. Prometheus must be really chained to his rock, and Dirce in very fact be tossed and gored by a wild bull; and Icarus must really fly though he fall and be dashed to death; and Hercules must ascend the funeral pyre and there veritably be burned alive. It was the ultimate romance of a brutalized and degraded people. And worse things than these; things indescribable and un-

terable were done. Infamous mythologies were enacted in which women were made to play their part in torments of shameful more intolerable than death. Christian women, modest maidens, holy matrons must be the Danaids, or the Proserpine, or worse and play their parts as priestesses of Saturn and Ceres and in blood stained dramas of the dead. A Christian boy must be the Icarus, a Christian man the Scævola or the Hercules, or the Orpheus of the amphitheatre. No wonder that Nero became to Christian imagination the very incarnation of evil; the Anti-Christ; the Wild Beast from the abyss; the great red dragon with a diadem and a name of blasphemy upon his brow. But Nero was not the only persecuting emperor."

It is one of the marvellous things that in the midst of all these obstacles the Christians kept their faith and grew in numbers, in power and in influence.

### THE FIRST GREAT ROMAN PERSECUTION

Any thought that Paul or his co-labourers might have had that Christianity would be able to come peaceably into its inheritance in the empire was rudely dissipated by the persecution which broke out in the reign of the Emperor Nero. Up to this time the Christians had been protected and shielded by the Roman magistrates; Paul had appealed to them when in difficulty and his appeal had been heard. From this time on, however, for many scores of years, the power of empire was to be exerted against the members of the church; they were to be brought before Roman judges and condemned, for the faith they professed, to torture and cruel death.

**The Immediate Cause** of the breaking out of this persecution and era of martyrdom, was the burning of Rome. On the 19th of June 64 A. D. in the tenth year of the reign of Nero a fire broke out the city in certain shops which were filled with inflammable materials. It continued to rage through the better and the poorer quarters of the city, destroying the palaces and temples as well as the tenements

alike, for six days and seven nights. Then its course was checked, but it broke out a second time and continued to rage for three days more until ten, out of fourteen districts were left in ruins. The calamity was a great one and deeply bemoaned by the people. The disaster, in the destruction of historical buildings, works of art, and priceless records, was irreparable.

**The Reason Given** for the persecution is that Nero—for the sake of diverting suspicion from himself—charged the Christians with the crime of burning the city, but why he should have singled them out remains a mystery for they were the most harmless of all his subjects. Some have conjectured that it was through the influence of Poppæa, the harlot empress, who was a Jewess; others have declared that it was because the followers of Christ rejected the pagan worship and made themselves obnoxious to the worshippers of the gods. Certainly some Roman writers speak of Christianity, looking at it from their point of view, as a “pestilential heresy.” The historian Tacitus writes of it with lordly disdain; and others looked upon its followers as guilty of atheism because they rejected the polytheism of the times. The Jews likewise in this trying period had no good words for the men who invited all to join in the worship of Christ, without first following in the way of the law.

Nero himself was suspected of setting the fire by his contemporaries and has been accused of it by many historians of his country. It is certain that for years his head was full of the burning of cities and he is said to have declared that Priam was fortunate in having seen the destruction of Troy. When some one quoted to him the line of Euripides, “When I am dead, sink the whole earth in flames!” he is said to have replied, “Nay, but while I live!” Certainly a man who deliberately planned the death of his mother, and executed that plan and killed his wife with a kick, would not hesitate very seriously at any crime.

**The Sufferings of the Christians.**—The numbers of the Christians in the city at this time must have been con-

siderable even to attract the attention of the emperor and the multitude. Tacitus says that those who confessed (that they were Christians) were first seized and then on their evidence "a huge multitude" were convicted. It is the phrase "huge multitude" which arrests attention at once, but Tacitus is a careful historian and in spite of all attempts to minimize its force by those who declare the Christians could have been but few at this time, it undoubtedly has a large basis of fact. Paul had come to Rome three years before and had dwelt there for two years. When it is recalled what he had done in Ephesus—and in many other cities—in converting so many that the whole city was stirred about the gospel which he preached it is not strange that, though a prisoner, he made his influence felt throughout the city in converting great numbers to Christ. Then, too, Paul shows by his letter to the Romans that there were many Christians in the city before he came, so that their "faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (Romans 1 : 8).

The torturing of the Christians. Again we rely upon Tacitus who pictures some terrible scenes and shows the cruelty of Nero and the Roman mob. He says, "And various forms of mockery were added to enhance their dying agonies. Covered with the skins of wild beasts they were doomed to die by the mangling of dogs, or by being nailed to crosses; or to be set on fire and burned after twilight by way of nightly illumination. Nero offered his own gardens for this show, and gave a chariot race mingling with the mob in the dress of a charioteer, or actually driving about among them." Dr. Farrar says, "Imagine that awful scene once witnessed by the silent obelisk in the square before St. Peter's at Rome! Imagine it that we may realize how vast is the change which Christianity has wrought in the feelings of mankind. There where the vast dome now rises was once the gardens of Nero. They were thronged with gay crowds among whom the emperor moved in his frivolous degradation—and on every side men were dying slowly on their cross of shame. Along the paths of those gardens on

the autumn nights were ghastly torches, blackening the ground beneath them with streams of sulphurous pitch, and each of those living torches was a martyr in his shirt of fire. And in the amphitheatre hard by in sight of twenty thousand spectators famished dogs were tearing to pieces some of the best and the purest of men and women, hideously disguised in the skins of bears and wolves. Thus did Nero baptize in the blood of the martyrs the city which was to be for ages the capital of the world."

**The Martyrdom of Paul.**—It was some time before this persecution was extended to the provinces, and Paul's enemies saw their opportunity to accuse him to the imperial court, where under the circumstances they would find a ready hearing. Paul was probably arrested at Nicopolis where he intended to winter (Titus 3 : 12) and hurried off to Rome. He endured no light imprisonment. Onesiphorus had difficulty in finding him (2 Timothy 1 : 16, 17) and he was closely confined in a common criminal dungeon (2 Timothy 2 : 9). From this dungeon he wrote the second epistle to Timothy and from thence he went to his death.

**Some Results.**—1. Gains. In spite of the fearful nature of the persecution and the perilous situation in which the church found itself, it made increasing gains. Many unbelievers who witnessed the tortures of the condemned Christians marvelled at their faith and constancy and turned to Christ.

2. Harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Neronian persecution also contributed to a union of Jewish and Gentile Christians. Amid common suffering, for the cause of Christ, mutual sympathy increased. The consolidation of the two again was greatly promoted by the Jewish insurrection against the Romans which resulted in the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70 A. D. By these great events "one main bond between the Christian Jew and Judaism was broken" and he was led, since the national celebrations at Jerusalem had become



impracticable, to turn more fully to Christ, and thus the church was enabled to take another forward step.

### QUESTIONS

What can be said of the church in Rome? When organized? Composition and meeting places? Paul's letter to the Roman Christians? Position and influence? What can be said of the city and the empire? The city of Rome? The empire? Helps in the progress of the church? What were the obstacles in the way of the church? Political? Religious? Moral and inhuman amusements? What can be said of the first great Roman persecution? The immediate cause? The reason given? The numbers and sufferings of the Christians? The martyrdom of Paul? Some results?

## STUDY V

### THE CHURCH IN THE CATACOMBS

#### THE CATACOMBS OF ROME

**The Records.**—In order to know what and how the church believed and what were its customs, in the early days of its existence, it is necessary to search every possible place where information bearing upon these matters may be obtained. Pagan and Christian writings alike are carefully examined and probed, and statement compared with statement, that we may get at the truth.

The inquiry for the exact facts leads also to the painstaking investigation of the records cut in stone and scratched and painted upon plaster in the burial places of the dead; here as nowhere else men have plainly expressed their religious hopes and beliefs.

In the Catacombs of Rome, where millions of Christians caused the expression of their faith and its emblems to be inscribed we find a vast mass of evidence respecting the early Christian faith which shows how thoroughly it met the deepest cravings of men for salvation from sin and communion with God. This evidence has been called "A Neglected Factor in the History of the Church" from the fact that it has not received the attention it deserved.

#### LOCATION AND MOTIVE

**Location.**—Around and near the city of Rome are a vast number of underground passages, corridors and chapels which the Christians of the first four centuries made and used for burying their dead and for worship.

These excavations, dating from the earliest Christian times, contain inscriptions, paintings, frescoes and sculptured

sarcophagi which are of great interest and value. By means of these we can look directly into the life of those who lived near Christ, and see how they regarded those things which we hold as the essentials of our faith.

“These Christian cemeteries are situated chiefly near the great roads leading from the city, and for the most part within a circle of three miles from the walls. From this circumstance they have been compared to the encampment of a Christian host besieging Pagan Rome and driving inward its mines and trenches with an assurance of final victory.”

**Motive.**—The Catacombs arose out of a desire on the part of the early Christians to be buried as their Lord. The Romans, believing in many gods, cremated their dead, placed the ashes in funeral urns, and arranged them in orderly rows, in buildings above ground. The great Appian Road was lined on either side with these structures—marble palaces in miniature.

Jesus, at His death, His body being wrapped in grave clothes, was placed in a rock-hewn sepulchre near Jerusalem. There were no rocky hills about Rome, in whose sides the Christians could excavate their graves, hence they must needs go below the surface until they came to the rock. This rock, a soft, volcanic tufa, readily lent itself to their purpose. The burial places so made they called “Catacombs” (hollow places).

## CONSTRUCTION

**The Mode** of construction was as follows: a piece of ground having been selected, the workmen dug through the soil, sinking a shaft at an angle of forty-five degrees until they were well into the rock at a distance of about fifty feet from the surface. Steps were made as they went down, in order that the descent might be easy. At the bottom of the shaft a tunnel or corridor was begun, say two and a half to five feet wide, and ten to twelve feet high, extending 200

feet (or to the limit of the holding) turning at right angles 200 feet again and again, and so back to the starting point.

Lateral passages were then made from corridor to corridor; chapels, some of considerable size, were hollowed out from the sides of the passageways. The bodies of the dead, wrapped as Christ's body, were placed in graves made in the side walls of the corridors. After the bodies were placed in their rocky niches, they were sealed by square inscribed slabs of marble or terrà cotta. The graves were made one above another with only a thin layer of rock between them. Usually five graves were made one above the other on either side of the corridor. When this story of the Catacomb was filled, the workmen (called Fossors) would begin a new one beneath it. In some of these subterranean cities of the dead there are five stories, one below the other.

**Sanctioned by Law.**—The Catacombs were made under the sanction of Roman law; the Christians organizing for this purpose under the name of Burial Clubs. There was no attempt to conceal the entrances; many of them in fact opened from well-travelled roads. The conclusion is irresistible that they were laid out by competent civil engineers; ample provision was made for ventilation; every sanitary precaution was taken; they were well lighted. The chapels were plastered or lined with marble. Many of the corridors were also plastered and decorated with ornamental and Christian symbols.

**Extent.**—De Rossi, one of the best authorities on this subject, estimates that there are over 600 miles of passages. We get an idea of their extent when we consider that they, if placed in a continuous line, would make an underground tunnel from Chicago to Buffalo, N. Y. Some conception of the great sum of money spent in their construction is gained from this illustration, for such a tunnel would be from fifty to one hundred feet underground. From four to eight millions of the bodies of Christians were here buried.

**Time.**—They were begun about the middle of the first

century, and were in actual use up to 410 A. D., when Alaric sacked the Imperial city. Five times during the fifth and as many times during the sixth century, Rome was pillaged. After the vandal hosts had exhausted the treasures of the city, they entered the Catacombs and rifled the sepulchres of the dead. If the matter had ended there it had been well; but now the church of Rome took a hand and removed tons of bones to the churches above ground. Many of the chapels were stripped of their marble linings which were used with the slabs from the graves for church pavements. Plundered by friend and foe, these ancient burial places were neglected and by the middle of the ninth century almost forgotten.

So the ages passed until 1578, when some working men, digging for Pozzolana near the Salarian Road, broke by accident into the Catacomb of St. Priscilla. The discovery of the graves, the chapels, the paintings which had in some way escaped mutilation, produced a profound impression upon the Christian world. Since then these cemeteries have been carefully preserved. It is surprising how much remains. In the persecutions which arose from time to time these places were used as harbours of refuge for the fleeing Christians; the passages were blocked up and new passages opened to prevent pursuit and afford means of escape.

## GROUPS

**Over Forty-two Groups of Catacombs** are now known and named. Each district of the city had its separate burial place. It would be interesting to describe the different groups of Catacombs, for each one has its story, but our space permits us to glance at but a few.

**St. Calixtus** is situated on the Appian Road near the second milestone. It contains some of the finest frescoes, paintings and earliest inscriptions. This is the Catacomb which visitors are usually shown, yet they see only that part which has been stripped of all its beauty and where there are only blackened walls. They come away disappointed and

with a totally erroneous impression of these underground cemeteries. To see the best parts of this as of all the other Catacombs, one must have special permission and a guide.

**Flavia Domatilla.**—Near by on the Ardeatina Road is the magnificent Catacomb of Flavia Domatilla. She and her husband, T. Flavius Clemens, were Christians. He is said to have been martyred for his faith and she was banished. They were closely related to the Emperor Domitian. "Their sons, the presumptive heirs to the throne, were brought up by a Christian mother." Here were placed the bodies of Flavia Domatilla, after her death, and her chamberlains Nereus and Achilles, who were martyred for their faith. The entrance is of fine brick work with a cornice of terra cotta. The staircase descends to the second level and opens upon one of the widest corridors known in all the Catacombs. A short distance down the passage there is a chamber or antechamber which opens into a large chapel. The walls are covered with the finest stucco and decorated with ornamental devices.

Upon the ceiling are depicted scenes from the Bible in the best classical style. It is a royal tomb of the first century and shows how early Christianity won its way into the reigning family.

**Lucina or Commodella** on the Road Ostiensis is undoubtedly the place where the body of St. Paul was laid to rest after his execution. The great church of St. Paul, without the walls, now stands over this Catacomb.

**Priscilla** on the Road Salaria is said to have been dug in ground belonging to the Roman Senator Pudens, mentioned by St. Paul in the Second Epistle to Timothy. The passages and chapels are very spacious; the frescoes with which they were adorned are of great beauty.

**Pretextatus.**—In the year 1850 J. B. De Rossi and Father Marchi penetrated to a low level in the Catacomb of Pretextatus which had not been plundered. They found numbers of unopened graves. The tablets were beautifully carved and ornamented with the early Christian symbols.



The corridors were of unusual height and width and supported by arches of solid masonry. In one of the chapels they found a tomb covered by a slab of marble in which were two massive bronze rings. On raising this cover they found the whole interior of the tomb cased with marble and two bodies lying side by side, one wrapped in cloth of gold and the other in purple. The frescoes of the chamber represented scenes from the gospel.

### PAINTINGS

"A universal instinct leads men to ornament the sepulchres of the dead." Egyptian and Roman tombs show the character and manner of the belief of those nations. In the Catacombs through the paintings, inscriptions and symbols with which they were adorned, we have laid bare the wonderful trust which the early Christians had in Christ. We have here shown His divinity, resurrection and His power in heaven and on earth, to save here and hereafter.

The Catacomb paintings have been divided into four classes :

**Ornamental** and without special significance ; vines and scroll work.

**Symbolical.**—Palms and crowns, doves, lambs, ships, anchors, etc. Some of the most important teaching is found in this class. The dove represented the Holy Spirit and the ship the church. One of the most common symbols was that of a fish : the initial letters of its Greek name stood for the names and titles of our Lord. The monograms of Christ's name enclosed in a circle around which were such sentences as, "*Christus est Deus*," "Christ is God"; "*Spes in eo*," "Hope in Him," are very numerous.

**Sacramental.**—There were many representations of the Lord's Supper and Baptism. The earliest and, in fact, all the pictures of this rite represent a person standing in the water while water is poured upon the head from a shallow basin.

**The Biblical Cycle.**—We have here many scenes from the Old and New Testaments, not veiled and obscure but easily recognized. The range of representation comprehends the grand drama from the fall of man to his restoration through the greater man Christ Jesus. A partial list of these paintings is here given: The Temptation and Fall, Adam and Eve driven from the Garden, Noah and the Ark, Sacrifice of Isaac, Moses receiving the Law, Job, Elijah, Jonah, the Three Hebrew Children, Daniel in the Lion's Den, Adoration of Christ by the Wise Men, Christ and the Doctors in the Temple, the Woman of Samaria, Opening the eyes of the Blind, the Paralytic healed by Christ, Miracles of the Loaves and Fishes, Raising of Lazarus by Christ, Peter's Denial, Pilate on the Judgment Seat, etc. Some of these paintings are worn and discoloured while others are as bright and fresh as if placed upon the walls and ceilings but yesterday. "There is a complete avoidance of all images of suffering and woe or tragic awfulness such as abound in sacred art above ground." "No sevenfold sorrows of the Mater Dolorosa. No cadaverous Magdalens accompanied by eyeless skulls," no pictures of tortures and fiery pangs of martyrdom, but only images of Christian joy and peace. The storm of persecution might rage without, but here all was a calm and holy gladness. Christ had conquered sin and death, why should His followers fear?

**Character.**—A remarkable characteristic of these subterranean cemeteries is the absence of all sensuous pictures. In Rome at this time art administered to the lowest passions; the pictures in private houses and public places all testify to this fact. Christianity had so cleansed the heart of her devotees that the Catacomb pictures appeal only to the better instincts of man's nature. They speak of another country and point to a higher destiny.

## INSCRIPTIONS

We turn now to the Inscriptions, and see in them the ideas with which the early Christians were familiar.

The heathen Roman met death with sullen resignation or blank despair. Immortality had become a jest with him.

The Christian met death with cheerfulness and hope. The day of death was counted the day of birth into a higher and grander life. To bring out this difference plainly there is here presented a few specimens of Pagan and Christian Burial Inscriptions:

**Pagan.**—These show how men without the knowledge of the true God met the awful mystery of death.

“I, Procope, lift up my hands against the god who snatched me away innocent.” “*Somno Eternali.*” (In eternal sleep.) “O husband dear to me, and dearest daughter, farewell.” “To a very sweet child whom the angry gods gave to eternal sleep.” “We are deceived by our vows, misled by time, and death derides our cares, anxious life is naught.” “Of all their wealth, they possess only this tomb.” “My play is ended, soon yours will be.” “*Vale Aeternum.*” (Farewell Forever.) “What sweet children, what dear pledges, a dire day has borne away, and plunged into bitter death.” “Here lies destroyed by fate, a son who was my only reason for living.”

**Christian.**—These show the triumphant faith of those who trusted in Christ.

“Called away by Angels.” (A youth of twenty-two years.) “Laurentius was born into eternity.” “Not lost but gone before.” “He went to God.” “Here rests a handmaid of God.” “Petrosa went to her rest, a handmaid of God and of Christ.”

“Prima, thou livest in the glory of God and in the peace of Christ our Lord.” “Refrain from tears, my sweet daughters and husband, and believe it is forbidden to weep for one who lives in Christ.” “Here reposes Laurentius who believed in the resurrection.” “He went to God.” “Theodora (twenty-one years old). Now she rejoices in the court of Christ, she reigns amid the choice odours of Paradise where the herbage is forever green beside the streams of heaven.” “The earth has the body, celestial realms the

soul." "Here rests my flesh, but at the last day through Christ, I believe it will be raised from the dead." A martyr's inscription reads as follows: "In Christ. In the time of the Emperor Hadrian, Marinus, a young military officer, who had lived long enough, when with his blood he gave up his life for Christ. At length he rested in peace. The well deserving set this up with tears and in fear on the 6th Ides of December."

### SPECIAL OBJECTS

Many interesting objects have been found: Multitudes of lamps, earthen and silver, made in the form of Christian symbols or with Christian symbols stamped upon them; silver vessels plated with gold used in administering the Lord's Supper; cameos and seal rings with the monogram of Christ cut in them; glass tumblers with pictures of the Holy Family and Peter and Paul in gold blown in the bottoms; phials of peculiar shape, some with the lees of wine used in the Eucharist and some with blood from the body of a martyr who suffered for the cause of Christ.

### TEACHING

All these things have a deep meaning. Our faith stands sure beyond the power of unbelief to destroy it. However man may gainsay the manuscripts or dispute about the meaning of texts, there can be no question about the belief of these early Christians as graven in the rock-hewn tombs.

They regarded Christ as the "Alpha and Omega," "God Christ Almighty," "He is the Intercessor and Saviour," "The Conqueror of Death." The Virgin Mary has no place here: Christ is the founder of His church.

The Trinity is acknowledged in many inscriptions "In the name of the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."

The government of the church was very simple.

The soul immediately entered the haven of the blessed. Purgatory finds no mention here.

There was a literal fellowship of believers in Christ. The wealthy noble recognized his servant as his fellow heir of glory, bowed with him at the table of their common Lord, and in death was buried with him in the same cemetery as a simple follower of Jesus Christ.

Although the Christians were in times of persecution treated with extreme cruelty, torn by wild beasts, burned and tortured, yet they followed Christ in a large forgiveness. No trace of an expression or sentiment of revenge against their persecutors is found in the Catacombs. They had their reward in a joy and peace that no cruelties could conquer.

If we would know the power of the religion of our God to change the lives of men who had been living in the midst of a gross and sensuous heathenism, and to make them not only pure and holy but heroic even to suffering a martyr death, we shall find it here.

If we would know the simplicity of Christianity, we must turn aside from the gorgeous churches of Rome above ground, at the present day, with their magnificent rituals and chanting priests and find it in these lonely crypts where ascended the hymns of the saints assembled beside the martyrs' graves.

## QUESTIONS

What can be said for the necessity of searching the old records! Where were the Catacombs located? What was the motive of their making? What can be said of the construction? Extent? Time of existence? Name some of the groups. What were the four classes of paintings and their significance? What can be said of the character of the paintings? What can be said of the inscriptions? Pagan and Christian? What can be said of the teaching?

## STUDY VI

### THE CHURCH IN WORSHIP

#### THE SERVICE OF WORSHIP

**Definition.**—Early Christian worship was a manifestation of the new spiritual life in Jesus Christ and a means by which that life was fostered and increased in power and efficiency.

**Participation** in this worship as a church member. The three essentials were: 1. Repentance of sin. 2. Faith in Christ. 3. Baptism (Acts 2 : 38, 41 ; 3 : 19 ; 4 : 12).

**Privileges** of this worship as a church member. There were four: 1. "The Christian became reconciled to God through appropriating to himself Christ's satisfaction for sin (Romans 5 : 10 ; 6 : 4-7 ; Colossians 1 : 20-22). His past life of sin no longer stood against him in his account with God. He was justified. 2. He was sanctified and henceforth called 'holy' because he belonged to God by the consecration of baptism (1 Corinthians 6 : 11). 3. He received the gift of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2 : 38) as a supernatural power within him. 4. He was admitted to the common life and sacraments of the Christian brotherhood. On his part, in turn, he was bound, so far as he could, to live up to the high standard of that life, to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness' (Ephesians 4 : 24)."

**Function.**—One of the great functions of the church is to teach men how to worship God ; to do this they must have right thoughts about God. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4 : 24). Men must be led in their worship by a proper exposition of the Scriptures, by prayer and by



praise. "Men not only need to be urged to be true to their consciences, but their consciences need to be informed." The place of the Christian church in this matter is clearly defined in the New Testament, it can be taken by no other institution; and no other organization has so high a mission as this, to bring man into harmony with God.

## UNIVERSALITY, PLACES, TIMES

**Universality.**—Christianity is no secret cult. Its principles and doctrines were promulgated not for a chosen few, but for all classes, kinds and conditions of men, in all ages (Romans 16: 25, 26; Acts 3: 25; 14: 15, 16; 17: 30, 31; 3: 22, 23; 4: 11; 5: 18; 11: 32). Jesus' parting instructions to His disciples were, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16: 15; Matthew 28: 19, 20; Acts 1: 8).

On the day of Pentecost this command began to be literally obeyed. Soon the gospel was being spread abroad, everywhere, and men of all nationalities came at its call to worship God. Whatever bands of Judaism were about it at first, it soon burst them by its marvellous growing power. It appealed to man as man. In this universal character it differed from all other religions. "The heathen religions belonged each to a particular nation." Whoever would accept the benefit of one of these must become a subject of the nation of which it was a part. The conception—and performance—of an act of religious worship as something apart from the state was a thought entirely foreign to the heathen mind. Even some of the apostles had a struggle to get free from the thought that Christianity was to be a reformed or modified Judaism.

The originality of Christianity is in the proclaiming of redemption for all under conditions which can be met by all.

**Places.**—They were of all kinds. The first meeting place for worship, after the ascension of Christ, was in an upper room in Jerusalem where prayer and supplication were

made by the disciples (Acts 1: 13, 14). The second place was the Temple where Peter preached his sermon (Acts 2: 4, 6, 46; 3: 11; 5: 12) and three thousand people were converted. The third place was the house church. When Peter was liberated from prison he came to the house of Mary, "where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12: 12)—Paul makes special mention of the "house church" in Romans 16: 5; 1 Corinthians 16: 19; Colossians 4: 15. The fourth place was the Jewish synagogue. In point of time, however, the synagogue preceded all places for Jesus, the Head of the Christian church, proclaimed His message in it when on earth. There are many instances of His preaching in synagogues. "And Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the Kingdom." (Matthew 4: 23). In Luke (4: 14-21) we again read that He taught in the synagogues of Galilee, and in the one in Nazareth He read from the prophet Isaiah (61: 1) and declared that this scripture was fulfilled in Him. Paul's custom was, in his missionary travels, to first seek the Jewish synagogue and to there proclaim his message (Acts 9: 20; 13: 5, 14, 42; 14: 1; 17: 10, 17; 18: 4, 19, 26; 19: 8), declaring that the Messiah and Saviour had come in the person of Jesus Christ. In case the message was heeded the worshippers would soon turn the place, practically, into a Christian meeting place; in case it was not heeded the Christians would split off from the Jewish congregation and seek houses or other places in which to meet. The Jewish synagogues played a great part in the helping to spread Christianity. They were very numerous throughout the Roman Empire. The fifth place was the distinctively Christian church edifice. At what definite time the Christians began to erect buildings for the purpose of holding services of worship in them is not known, but as they were accustomed to hold frequent assemblies and the congregations rapidly increased it is manifest that private houses would soon cease to accommodate them. In First Corinthians (11: 20-22) Paul implies

that the Corinthian church was meeting in some place other than a house (1 Corinthians 11: 18). That they did erect buildings—or hire them—and some of them of very good size is quite manifest in spite of the numerous persecutions to which they were subjected. That, later on, the church edifices grew to be large, numerous, and had lands attached to them is shown by the decree of the Emperor Diocletian in 302 A. D., ordering their destruction and the confiscation of their lands. It, however, should be remembered that as Christianity was a religion of the spirit it was preached anywhere and everywhere, in the market place, by the roadside, by the river's brink, by the seashore and in the house. It did not depend upon a certain place or a ritual, but men in every place could worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4: 21-24).

The publicity or secrecy with which the meetings were held varied greatly and according to circumstances. In times of persecution the Christians were often compelled to abandon public services. Then there would be periods of many years in which they met together in the most open way and publicly invited unbelievers in.

**Times.**—The custom of the New Testament churches was to meet for worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20: 7; 1 Corinthians 16: 2; Revelation 1: 10). The first day of the week was selected and held sacred because the Lord Himself had sanctified it by His resurrection (Matthew 28: 1; Mark 16: 2; Luke 24: 1; John 20: 1, 19), and had further emphasized it by an appearance to the disciples (John 20: 26) and again by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which that year was also the first day of the week. "The Lord's Day is, in an especial sense, the feast of life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was not merely the raising to life of an individual man but of human nature." All that was true in the spiritual content for the observance of the Mosaic commandment for the use of the Sabbath day is found in the Lord's Day and more. "The church professed to be a divine devel-

opment of Judaism (Acts 24 : 14, etc.). All that was eternally true in the law is with us still and that which was essentially transitory was tolerated "until its usefulness was seen and it passed away. Undoubtedly many Jewish Christians at first observed both the Jewish Sabbath and the Lord's Day. Paul's custom was, it seems, often to observe both days, for he entered the Jewish synagogues and preached there on the Sabbath days and he also met with the distinctively Christian congregations on the Lord's Day. It was doubtless also customary at first for the Christians to meet daily (Acts 2 : 42, 46), but this might have been early in the morning or at night before and after the day's work was done. One writer says, "In addition to the ordinary Jewish worship, at first, at stated hours in the temple, the disciples met daily in groups in private houses. At these meetings they sat at the table together and partook of a common meal, the Agape or love feast. At the close of this repast, whosoever presided handed around the bread and wine as Jesus had done at the last supper. This was the primitive form of sacrament."

The emphasis in regard to the times of meeting was not upon the "ought" but upon the "love" of doing so. There is a vast difference between a man keeping one day a week sacred because he is obliged to do so by some law or custom and the observance of a holy day because it is a delight to do so. The great emphasis of New Testament teaching is upon the manifestation of the spiritual life in seeking both times and places to make known and increase that life. The early disciples when they met daily in the temple did so not because they were required to do so, but because it was a heart service. When Paul speaks as he does to the Galatians about the observance of days and months and years he is evidently (Galatians 4 : 10; compare 4 : 1-9 and 5 : 1-26) trying to show them that mere observance of rules without any heart in it is not what God wants. Again, when Christ said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2 : 27) He

immediately expounds it with, "Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil, to save life or to kill" (Mark 3 : 4)? To those who cease from secular work upon the Lord's Day and make it a pleasure day with no attempt to build up the spiritual life, and with no seeking of God to worship Him, this day is often a positive detriment. The injunction, "let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together . . . as the manner of some is" (Hebrews 10 : 25) and the exhortations of the early Christian writers for the observance of the Lord's Day were to the end of building up the spiritual life. Clement, Barnabas, Justin Martyr and Ignatius unite in urging their fellow Christians to meet together often that they may retain and increase their faith in the midst of a gross heathenism and frequent severe persecutions.

### FORMS, GIFTS, ORDINANCES

**Form of Public Worship.**—1. Orderliness. Paul exhorted the Corinthian church, "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14 : 26-33, 40). The effort was made in all the churches to carry out this injunction.

2. Openness. The public services, which all Christians were expected to attend, were also open to non-Christians as well; in this respect they had a missionary aspect and were of great usefulness in extending a knowledge of the Christian religion.

3. Simplicity. As the church was, in certain respects, an outgrowth of the Jewish synagogue it partook of its simplicity. There were no gorgeous rituals, no chanting priests, no worship of the Virgin Mary or adoration of saints, no pictures of Christ hanging upon the cross and no confessionals; all these came after the primitive age of the church had passed and when men had given up a heart religion for that of a form. Besides the descriptions of the simple life of the early churches drawn for us in the Acts and epistles there are two others—among many such—which are here set

down; one is by a Christian and the other by a heathen writer.

Justin Martyr, an early church father (b. 105—d. 165 A. D.) wrote, "And on the day called Sunday all who live in the city or in the country gather together to one place and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and as we before said when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings according to his ability and the people assent saying Amen. And there is a distribution to each and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do and willing, give what each thinks fit, and what is collected is deposited with the president who succours the orphans and widows and those in sickness or want, the prisoners and the strangers among us."

Pliny, the governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, in 112 A. D. wrote a letter to the emperor Trajan in which he says—after a careful official examination of many Christians in regard to their worship with a view of finding charges against them—"They affirmed that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light and sing among themselves a hymn to Christ as a God, and to bind themselves with an oath not to the commission of any wickedness, but that they would not be guilty of theft or robbery or adultery: would not falsify their word or refuse to return a pledge committed to them, when called upon to do so. When these things were performed, it was their custom to separate and then come together for a meal which they ate in common but without disorder."

4. Arrangement of the public service. "In First Corinthians we find that Paul presents to us two kinds of Christian worship. In chapter fourteen is described a meeting



whose chief aim is mutual edification ; in chapter 11 : 17-34 one of a very different character and ceremonial, the purpose of which is to partake of the Lord's Supper." It is for a meeting of the first kind that there was a public order of service ; the second was of a private character and limited to baptized Christians.

There were four prominent and essential elements in the public service of worship.

(a) Teaching. Under this would be included the reading of the Scriptures (Colossians 4 : 16 ; James 1 : 22 ; 1 Thessalonians 5 : 27 ; 1 Timothy 4 : 13). While the Epistles might not yet have been classed as Scripture, in the true sense of the word, yet they might have been regarded as such. There is here shown, however, the practice followed from the custom of the Jewish synagogue (Acts 13 : 15 ; Luke 4 : 16-27) and which we still follow. Again a discourse or sermon came after the reading of the Scriptures in the Jewish synagogue and this we find to be the case in the Christian assemblies (Acts 20 : 7). There might be more than one discourse after the reading.

The teaching was not confined to the reading of the Scriptures and the sermons in the public services ; there was also a large work done in the instruction of new converts in the facts of the Old Testament, the facts about Christ—His life on earth, death and resurrection—and the Christian doctrines. This work was continual, painstaking and unremitting. There was a "gift of teaching" and a class of men like Aquila and Apollos who gave themselves to this needed work ; they were called teachers.

(b) Prayer "was made standing (Mark 11 : 25) or kneeling (Acts 20 : 36 ; 21 : 5) with uplifted hands" (1 Timothy 2 : 8). The prayer of one person was often accepted as the prayer of all, the congregation assenting to it (Acts 4 : 24-30). There were special objects of prayer (Acts 12 : 5) for the advance of the Gospel (Romans 15 : 30 ; Ephesians 6 : 18 ; Colossians 4 : 3 ; 2 Thessalonians 3 : 1) civil rulers (1 Timothy 2 : 1) erring members (James 5 : 16 ;

1 John 5 : 16) but of a formulated set of prayers there is no trace except the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6 : 9-13) and certain benedictions (Romans 15 : 33 ; 16 : 20).

(c) Praise. The hymns and ascriptions of praise are very frequently found in the New Testament and the early Christian writers. They express great religious emotion and thankfulness. There was not only singing of hymns and Psalms, but outbursts of spoken praise of the goodness of God and for salvation through Jesus Christ (Romans 9 : 5 ; 16 : 25 ; Galatians 1 : 5 ; Ephesians 3 : 20 ; Philippians 4 : 20 ; 1 Timothy 1 : 17 ; Romans 11 : 33-36 ; Revelation 4 : 11 ; 11 : 17 ; 15 : 3 ; Acts 16 : 25 ; 1 Corinthians 14 : 15 ; Colossians 3 : 16 ; James 5 : 13). Paul writing to the Ephesians says, "Speaking to yourselves in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to God. Giving thanks in all things always unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (5 : 19, 20) and to the Philippians (4 : 4) "Rejoice in the Lord alway : and again I say, Rejoice."

(d) The offering. This consisted of the purely voluntary contributions of the congregation. It was so from the beginning ; even in that wonderful outburst of religious enthusiasm when all the property was given up by certain converts there was no requirement about the matter (Acts 4 : 34, 35 ; compare 5 : 4). It was no compulsory act and probably not universal, for we find a number of instances where all the property was not handed over as in the case of Mary the mother of Mark who owned a house in Jerusalem (Acts 12 : 12) and Tabitha who had means of her own which she bestowed in almsgiving (Acts 9 : 36). But the principle of the voluntary offering was fully established. Every man was to give according to his ability (Acts 11 : 29) and the offering was taken upon the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16 : 2). If a man chose to give all he had or a certain proportion, that was a matter settled between him and God, but all were urged to contribute to the full extent of their ability. The money was used for the poor of

the church, for missionary purposes (Acts 6:1; 2:45; 4:35; 11:29; 24:17; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 2:10), the support of the ministry (1 Corinthians 9:14, 4-14; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:18), the other expenses of maintaining the church organization and gifts for special objects.

**Form of Private Worship.**—Our Lord laid much stress upon the inward worship with the heart. The Sermon on the Mount is an exposition—with the Beatitudes as the text—of the necessity of the heart service of God which must precede all true public worship. He said: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:21), "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6) and "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit" (Matthew 7:17-20).

**Gifts.**—There were many manifestations of divine power in the early church, by the Holy Spirit. We find mention of these manifestations in the Charisma, or gifts, as they were called. "Every Christian possessed one or more gifts of the Holy Ghost. These gifts were of many kinds, including all the mental, moral and spiritual endowments of the Christian." Paul gives a list of these different gifts and shows their diversity by the same spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:1-12. We recognize many in this list as still in the possession of Christians; others, like the gifts of miracles and tongues, seem to have been withdrawn.

Every Christian was called upon then—and is now—to exercise his gift. "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10, 11).

Every gift, however, was to be used with due regard to the rights of others. In the Corinthian church where there were certain abuses of gifts (1 Corinthians 14:26-33) and those who possessed the gift of speaking or of tongues were

exercising them irrespective of each others' rights. Paul lays down certain rules. "(1) Not more than one to speak at a time, each must wait his turn. (2) The one who is speaking to stop if he perceives another waiting to deliver a revelation. (3) The 'speaker in tongues' is not allowed to speak unless an interpreter be present. (4) The revelation of the prophet is to be checked by those who possess the gift of 'discerning spirits.'"

The different gifts were bestowed for the purpose of building up the church.

**Ordinances.** (See an account also of them in Study I).  
—1. Baptism. This was the rite by which the convert was formally admitted to the church (Acts 2: 41). Baptism was by the command of Christ and was performed in the name "of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28: 19); it was—and is—the outward sign of the inward cleansing and is to be administered to all Christians (Acts 19: 1-5; Romans 6: 3; Colossians 2: 11-13; John 3: 5; 1 Peter 3: 20, 21).

The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26) was not only a part of the worship, but a cardinal point in it. The observance of this feast was also by the command of Christ, who said, "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22: 19, 15-22; Matthew 26: 26-28; Mark 14: 21-26). His body was broken for us, His blood was shed for the remission of our sins. The expression of the "breaking of bread" in Acts 2: 42 has reference to something more than a common meal. It was a religious act (1 Corinthians 10: 16).

This service was of a much more private character than the public one of worship (1 Corinthians 11: 17-34) and restricted to baptized Christians. There seems to have been at first a daily administration of this ordinance (Acts 2: 46), but later it seems to have been observed every first day of the week (Acts 20: 7). At first also it was held in the evening at the close of a meal eaten in common, following the example of Christ and His disciples. The meal was called the Agape—or love feast—and was afterwards separated

from the Eucharist. The Lord's Supper being held in the early morning while the common meal was eaten in the evening. Now the celebration of the Lord's Supper is by itself a result foreshadowed in Paul's advice to the Corinthian Christians when he saw the abuses which grew out of the meal eaten in common. The significance of this ordinance was deepened and intensified in the minds and hearts of the Christians as its great spiritual meaning was more and more clearly perceived. This was the central point of worship in the apostolic age.

### OBJECTS, RESULTS

**Objects.**—If we look at the textual testimony, as it stands in the New Testament and also that of the early Christian writers, we find that God, the Father, was exalted and worshipped and Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. The baptismal formulas were in the names of the three in one.

Christ was the Lord and Saviour who had come from the Father, who had appeared on the earth in bodily form and was, after His ascension, still with the disciples comforting, leading and blessing not only them but all who had faith in Him and called upon His name.

The centrality of the worship in Christ is very plainly stated by Paul, "That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father" (Philippians 2:11, 5-11; Colossians 1:13-21).

The testimony to this exaltation and worship of Jesus Christ is found in many passages—only a few of which are given here—in the books of the New Testament. These passages may be grouped under five heads:

(a). **Preexistence of Christ.**—With God, the Father, before the world was (John 1:1; 6:62; 8:58; 17:5; 2 Corinthians 8:9). He came down from heaven (John 3:13; 13:3; 16:28; 1 Corinthians 15:47; John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-18).

(b). **Divine Titles Given Christ**—The Word was God

(John 1:1). "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). "Who is over all God blessed forever" (Romans 9:5). "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). "But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever" (Hebrews 1:8). "This is the true God" (1 John 5:20).

(c). Divine Attributes Ascribed to Christ.—Eternity (John 1:2). Unchangeableness (Hebrews 1:11). "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to day and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). Everywhere present (John 3:13; Matthew 18:20). "I am with you alway even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). All knowing, "All things are delivered unto Me by My Father" (Matthew 11:27; John 2:23-25). All powerful, "Upholding all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord which is and which is to come, the Almighty (Revelation 1:8).

(d). Divine Works Wrought by Christ—"All things were made by Him" (John 1:3-10). "For by Him were all things created" (Colossians 1:16, 17). Upholding all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). Judgment, "Before Him shall be gathered all nations" (Matthew 25:31, 32).

(e). Supreme Worship to be Paid to Christ (Matthew 28:19).—All men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father (John 5:23; John 14:1; Acts 7:59, 60; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Revelation 1:5, 6).

**Results.**—The exaltation of Christ exalted the lives of the worshippers; they died to the old lives of sin and strove to be renewed in the purity and holiness of the life of the Master whom they served and revered. The good results of the new worship were so plain and manifest that they were a marvel to many heathen writers. To those most zealous in the performance of their duties of worship came the largest results.



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## QUESTIONS

Give a definition of early Christian worship. What were the three essentials of participation in it? What were its privileges? What was its function? What can be said of its universality? Give an account of the places and times. What can be said of the form of public worship? Orderliness? Openness? Simplicity? Arrangement of the public service—the four essential elements? What can be said of the form of private worship? What can be said of gifts? What can be said of the ordinances? What can be said of the objects and results of service?

## STUDY VII

### THE CHURCH IN THE BOOKS

#### THE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS

**The First Written Documents** used by the Church were the books of the Old Testament. These constituted the Bible of our Lord.

The gospel of Christ was preached and the church was organized before the writings, which are now collected in our New Testament, came into existence.

**An Appeal for the Truth** of the new Christian doctrine was made to the Old Testament books.

Jesus Christ declared that "this scripture" was fulfilled in Him (Luke 4: 16-22). He said, after His resurrection, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning Me" (Luke 24: 44).

Peter in his speech on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 16-47), Stephen in his address to the Council (Acts 7: 1-60), and Paul in his defense before the Jews in the Temple (Acts 22: 1-14) and also before Felix (Acts 24: 10-21) and Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26: 1-32), show the esteem and reverence they have for the authority and inspiration of the Old Testament.

When the New Testament books came finally to be written we find their authors constantly referring, in about six hundred references and quotations, to the ancient sacred books of the Jews.

The early Christians delighted to read in the Prophets, where they found prophecies and foreshadowings of Christ, His sufferings and His victory.

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THE TRANSITION PERIOD

There is such dependence, now, upon the records of the New Testament for a knowledge of the historical Christ and the organization of the primitive churches that it is hard to realize that for a number of years, after His resurrection there was no written history, so far as we know, of these great matters.

This transition period, from the use of the Old Testament to the New Testament—the use of both—and the change from oral to written testimony, is one of great interest. “We are so accustomed to reading, writing and printing that it is difficult to make real to ourselves a state of things in which the oral was the usual way of gaining influence for personality or currency of ideas. No less than three of the schools of Hellenic philosophy got their very names for places where oral instruction was conducted. The like would have been still more true in Palestine or again of the stratum of Gentile society which Paul’s mission mostly reached.”

**The Eye-witnesses** or those who saw Christ. The gospel story, and its significance, was first told by men who had personal knowledge of the events which they related. The testimony of competent eye-witnesses cannot be impeached and is superior to any other. Peter and John (Acts 3-5ch) and the other disciples had no use for written testimony to attest the truth of their message; they were well qualified witnesses to a certain set of facts of which the hearers, whom they addressed, had more or less knowledge.

**Ear-witnesses.**—There were multitudes, dwellers in Jerusalem and Palestine, who heard those who had seen the Christ and, having ample opportunity to verify the facts, believed in Him. Many visitors in Jerusalem who lived in distant cities also heard the words of those who had seen the wonderful things which they related and carried away the truth with them to tell the story to others (Acts 2 : 5-11, 41 ; 4 : 4 ; 8 : 1).

This oral testimony was greatly preferred and was listened

to with more eagerness than any reading from the New Testament records even after they came into existence. Papias—a disciple of Polycarp, who was a disciple of John the Apostle—expressed the general sentiment—in the first half of the second century—when he wrote, “If then any one came who had been a follower of the elders I would question him about the words of the elders what, by their report Andrew or what Peter had said, or what had been said by Philip or by Thomas, or by James, or by John or by Matthew or by any other of the disciples of the Lord . . . for I did not think I could get so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice.”

In this period the gospel was preached in Jerusalem, throughout Palestine and carried into the cities of Asia Minor and to Rome itself.

### THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

**The Book Witnesses.**—When the churches began to be numerous and Christianity to take wider and wider ranges the necessity for a permanent record of those things believed in and taught about the Christ became very apparent. The first witnesses could not go everywhere; they were also departing out of this world. There was reason also why the Word should be guarded from error and transmitted in its purity to later generations. Irenaeus of Lyons, born in Smyrna—also a disciple of Polycarp who was a disciple of John the Apostle—writes, “Matthew then published his gospel among the Hebrews in their own language. . . . Mark the disciple and interpreter of Peter also transmitted to us in writing those things which Peter had prepared; and Luke the attendant of Paul recorded in a book the gospel which Paul had declared. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, published his gospel while staying at Ephesus in Asia.”

**The Contents of the New Testament.**—There are

twenty-seven books ; five historical ; twenty-one epistles ; one Apocalypse. "They consist of records of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a historical account of the early churches and of the missionary work of some of their leaders ; a number of letters to churches and individual persons, treating of the profoundest questions of religious truth, but also devoting much attention to practical duties and Christian administration, and abounding in expressions of affectionate interest ; and lastly standing quite by itself, the Apocalypse, with its mysteries of strange symbolism."

**Time of Writing.**—These books were not all written at the same time and it was many years before they were gathered in one volume as we now have them. The actual time of writing extended over a period from about 50–100 A. D. with probably a majority of the books written between 50 and 70 A. D., within the comparatively short period of about thirty-five years after the death of Christ.

**Order of the Books.**—They are not placed—in our New Testament—in the order of their composition. A number of epistles were written before the gospels and one of the gospels, John's, was not written until near the close of the first century. The order in the New Testament is that of historical happening and importance.

**The Five Historical Books.**—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts. They were written between 60 and 70 A. D. with the exception of John which was written near the close of the first century.

The four gospels rightly take the first place in our New Testament. "They narrate events that precede the epistles ; and in those events they give the key to all that follows showing the root and the foundation of the new Christian life, the development of which is illustrated in the epistles. The supreme glory of the gospels comes from their subject. Never before had writers such a theme." While Paul's epistles may take precedence in time and in being read in the churches, it is quite certain that Matthew, Mark and Luke were regarded as the first authoritative writings and constituted

the first New Testament, with John's gospel placed next to them when it was written.

The first three gospels are known as the Synoptic Gospels. There is in them a remarkable amount of similarity in substance, general arrangement and order of their narratives. Yet each one has a distinct purpose in view. Matthew is seeking to impress the fact upon his hearers that Jesus is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament; about sixty five passages are quoted from the Jewish Scriptures to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of law, the prophecy and hope of Israel. Mark has evidently in mind the Romans. No genealogy is given as none was needed. The idea is divine power ministering to men and at the same time attesting Christ's claim as the Son of God and Lord of the world. There is an energetic brevity and rapidity of movement. Luke had in mind the Greeks. The genealogy of Christ is traced to Adam, to connect Him with the whole race and make Him the Saviour of both Jew and Gentile. The world-wide character of Christianity is vividly portrayed. Christ is the divine Saviour of all men. There are many problems in regard to these gospels of which lack of space here forbids the discussion. Scholars to-day are at work upon the questions as to the relation of the Hebrew gospel by Matthew, mentioned by Papias, and the Matthew Greek gospel, the relation of Matthew and Luke to Mark and their differences and resemblances. The question behind all, however, is the truthfulness in the reporting of the facts by the Synoptic Gospels. In regard to this there is a general agreement amongst scholars, "that the subject matter of these gospels is marked by traits which show that the information proceeds direct from those who have lived amid the surroundings described. The characteristics of Jewish life and thought in Palestine in the first half of the first century of our era are reflected in the narrative with a truth which could not have been otherwise imparted. . . . Placed as the evangelists were when they wrote, they could not have accurately reproduced the features of an age which



had passed away, as they are found to have done, except from immediate knowledge of their own, the reports of those who possessed it, or the use of documents based on it." Archæological investigations and searching inquiries into the political, social and religious circumstances of the times are showing in a clear light the truthfulness of these gospels to the facts.

John's gospel, written some time after the first three in the gospel story "told from a point of view acquired through long reflection and experience and through sharing in the ever widening work and conflicts of the Church." The purpose is clearly stated in John 20: 30, 31, "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book, but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name." The great subject of this book is a Divine Being who became flesh and dwelt amongst men. Jesus is the Messiah from the first. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1: 1). Another portion of the ministry is described from that in the Synoptic Gospels but the fundamental teaching is the same. Here again scholars, in endeavouring to account for differences and resemblances from the other gospels, raise certain problems which have not yet been made clear but the historical probability in regard to the facts rests upon a sure foundation. John the Apostle, to whose authorship this gospel is ascribed, "had the immediate knowledge of the facts and a wide and large conception of their significance."

The Acts is the fifth historical book and properly has its place next to the gospels in the New Testament. The author is Luke a companion of Paul and there is here told in a very graphic way how, beginning at Jerusalem, the gospel found its way into the cities of Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and finally came to Rome itself.

**The Twenty-one Epistles.**—The thirteen letters of

Paul take first place and the chief of them have never been disputed as his productions. They were called forth by the necessity he found in his wide field to communicate with the churches which he had organized.

They were written between the years 50-67 A. D.

Paul's Epistles naturally divide themselves into four groups. 1. First and Second Thessalonians. They illustrate the Apostle's earlier missionary instruction to his converts—hence the name, "Missionary Epistles." They treat of but one doctrinal subject—the Second Coming of Christ. Emphasis is laid, however, upon the divinity of Christ who is referred to as, "The Lord" "Our Lord" about twenty-five times. 2. Galatians, First and Second Corinthians, Romans. We here find that Christianity is being defined and differentiated from Judaism and Heathenism. It is a period of conflict. The great question discussed is "on what terms does God save men?" Paul maintains that the sole basis of salvation is the grace of God through Jesus Christ to be appropriated by faith on the part of man. 3. Colossians, Philemon, I; hesians, Philippians. The great question discussed here is, "What is the nature, the rank, the dignity of the Mediator of salvation?" "Is He one of a series of Saviours or does He stand supreme and solitary?" Other matters are discussed but this is the great question. The reason for raising the question was the development of certain false religious beliefs. Paul is in no doubt as to the supremacy of Christ. He is the supreme divine Saviour (Colossians 1: 15-20; Ephesians 1: 10, 20-23; Philippians 2: 5-11). This question has the strong attention of men to-day. 4. First Timothy, Titus, Second Timothy. It is generally agreed among scholars that no place can be found for the writing of these epistles in the period covered by Luke in his narrative in the Acts. Many eminent scholars hold, however, agreeing with the tradition of the church, that Paul was released from his first imprisonment and that it was in the interval between that and his second imprisonment and death that he wrote these

letters. Eusebius says (H. E. 2 : 22-2) that Paul according to tradition went forth upon a missionary tour after his release from his first imprisonment and that he ended his life by martyrdom under Nero. He also speaks of his writing in this second imprisonment the Second Epistle to Timothy.

The Epistle to the Hebrews has a place by itself. It was ascribed to Paul very early but by many scholars its authorship is considered to be by some very able evangelical unknown author. It upholds the supremacy of Christ over prophets, angels, Moses and the old covenant.

The seven other epistles, John three, Peter two, James one, Jude one, are called "Catholic" in the sense of being circular letters and are intended for more than one church. They represent different modes of apprehending our Lord and His work and of building up the Christian faith. Some of these were the last books to be received into the canon and in the case of Second Peter there has been a searching examination of its credentials in regard to its coming from Peter.

**The Apocalypse.**—The main theme of this book is the triumph of Christ, pictorially set forth as the glorious consummation of great struggles and marvellous events. Its unity has recently been assailed but the attempts to disintegrate it have not met with general acceptance. It was written by John the apostle, in the first century in the midst of great persecution; it was of great encouragement and comfort to the early Christians.

## THE USE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

**In the Churches.**—The New Testament writings began to be extensively used, as soon as they were available, in the churches. Paul requests that his letters be read to the congregations (1 Thessalonians 5 : 27; Colossians 4 : 16) to which they were sent and that they be exchanged for letters written to other churches which be likewise publicly read.

The gospels also were used in written form, taking rank in value above all the other writings.

The manuscripts were widely scattered over the Roman empire and preserved in the church treasure book chests. As one manuscript, of a gospel or epistle, could not serve all the churches there speedily came a demand for copies which was supplied by the scribes, who made the transcribing of manuscripts their business. Great care was exercised in this work of copying and it is quite evident from the manuscripts we now have, and from notices in early Christian writings, that, from an early date, there was little or no deviation from certain well known forms. There were many other Christian writings in those early times which sought for the same canonical standing, but there was a very careful sifting process exercised which excluded them from the list of the new sacred books. In collecting the manuscripts, and copies of them, each church sought for those which represented most closely the facts about Christ and the apostolic teachings. We have to-day in our New Testament these books.

**By Early Christian Writers.**—Writings which are of great weight and importance soon begin to impress themselves upon contemporary literature. The New Testament is no exception to this rule. We find many writers, of the first three centuries, referring to the facts and doctrines set forth in it, and making quotations from and translations of its books. It is by means of these mentions of early writers that we have independent testimony of the way in which they were looked upon and are able to see how far back their existence can be traced, the use that was made of them and the truthfulness of the manuscripts which we now possess.

Only a few of the writers—who bear independent testimony to the authenticity of the New Testament books—can be mentioned here and that in the briefest way.

1. Some writers of the Sub-Apostolic Age or “the generation immediately following that of the Apostles.”

Clement of Rome was born about 30 and died about 95 A. D. He was pastor of the church in Rome and is supposed to be the Clement mentioned by Paul in Philippians (4 : 3). His life period was passed in this most important age of the Christian church. His pastorate in Rome was contemporaneous with that of John the Apostle in Ephesus. Amongst his writings there is extant an Epistle to the Corinthians—which can be bought in an English translation. “It is saturated with the language of the New Testament. It contains the words of Peter, James, John and Luke. It has passages based upon Paul’s Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Thessalonians, Ephesians, Timothy, Titus, of James, of Peter, to the Hebrews and the Acts of the Apostles.”

Ignatius, pastor or bishop of the church in Antioch as early as about 69 A. D. He watched over his flock during the persecutions of Domitian, but sent to Rome under Trajan, he was there condemned to be thrown to the wild beasts in the Roman amphitheatre. The date of his death is 107 A. D. or a little later. He wrote a number of epistles. They are addressed to the Romans, to Polycarp and to some of the Asiatic churches. “There are in these epistles several allusions to the life of Christ which are recorded in our gospels as well as parallelisms of expressions with them.” “In one Epistle (Philad. V) his language suggests the idea that he is thinking of the gospel as embodied in a written form ; for he speaks of it as something to which Christians could, as it were, turn, and refers in the same context to the Prophets.” In another epistle (Smyrn. III) he asserts the verity of Christ’s corporeal nature after His resurrection, seemingly quoting from Luke 24 : 36–39 where the words are similar in substance and in form.

Polycarp was pastor or bishop of Smyrna. He was born soon after the middle of the first century and was martyred about the year 156 A. D. When he was urged to give up Christ by the Roman judge, who finally condemned him to be burned to death, he said, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any wrong : how can I

blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" Polycarp was a disciple of John the Apostle, who was bishop of Ephesus. He wrote a number of epistles which have all disappeared from sight, but one. This one is now printed in an English translation. In it "he states the fact of our Lord's resurrection and ascension to glory. He refers to the teachings of the Lord and His apostles. He refers also to the 'Oracles' of our Lord, which was the word for the written gospels. He quotes the language of Peter, of Paul, of Matthew and of John."

2. Some writers of the second century.

Papias, a disciple of Polycarp, was born about 74 A. D. and suffered martyrdom about 163 A. D. He was bishop of Hierapolis (mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4: 13). He was a friend and disciple of Polycarp and he had conversed with men of an older generation than his who could give first hand information as to what the oral teaching of the apostles was. Many of the intimate friends of the apostles were known to him. He wrote a large work, "Interpretations of the Sayings of the Lord," which has unfortunately disappeared, but there are quite a number of quotations from it preserved in the works of Irenæus and Eusebius. Papias tells us that Mark was a companion of Peter and that he wrote a gospel. He cannot have been ignorant of our canonical Matthew, for he speaks of Matthew's Hebrew Gospel and its interpreters, and he seems also to have known the fourth gospel (c. 110-125 A. D.). It has also been pointed out that Papias's preface is written in obvious imitation of Luke (1: 1-4). He uses material from the gospels and quotes from the early Epistle of John and one of the Epistles of Peter. He knew the Book of Revelation and maintained it was divinely inspired. He also spoke of the value of oral tradition (see quotation under section "Eye Witnesses") and of the care he took to be sure of everything he stated that it might be in accord with that "given from the Lord to the Faith, and who are sprung from the truth itself." "The Fragment of Papias's Expositions of



the Oracles of the Lord," published by De Boor, states that some of those brought to life by Jesus lived until the time of the Emperor Hadrian. His witnessing to the truth of the New Testament books is of the greatest value.

Between Papias's youth and old age dependence on oral tradition has given place to books.

Justin Martyr, a very learned man, was teaching as a Christian philosopher in Ephesus soon after 135 A. D. His principal works are his "First and Second Apologies" and "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew." They were composed about 150 A. D. His chief authorities in setting forth the "Life and Teachings of our Lord" are the gospels as we have them in the New Testament. The principal features of the Synoptics are directly and fully reproduced and the conception of Christ as the Logos, as we find it in John's gospel, holds a prominent place in Justin's works.

As the apostles had all passed away and also about all of their immediate successors the reliance is now wholly upon the written gospels.

Tatian, a pupil of Justin Martyr, made a Harmony of the Four Gospels ("Diatessaron"); the discovery of which forever settled the question in regard to the use of our four gospels by early Christian churches and writers. This "Harmony" is made up of our Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Irenæus (b. 135 A. D.—d. 202 A. D.), pastor or bishop of the church of Lyons, takes the next step "in leading to the exclusive use of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and treatment of the evangelist's own language as inspired." (See quotation from Irenæus under section, "Book Witnesses.") He makes in his known works (174–189 A. D.) "about twelve hundred references to the New Testament. Of this number four hundred are to the gospels; he makes eighty references to the gospel of John alone." He speaks of the Book of Revelation as "authentic on the authority of 'those who saw John face to face' and then tells us that the Revelation was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, towards the end of the reign of Domitian."

In Irenæus and the later writers which follow we note how very numerous are the quotations from the gospels and other New Testament books showing how great is the confidence in their truthfulness, since the apostles and their immediate successors have passed away and the Oral Age has been superseded.

3. Some writers whose lives reach over into the third century and later.

Tertullian of Carthage in Africa (b. 150—d. 230 A. D.) was about forty years of age when he was converted. His father, a Roman centurion, gave him a splendid education. He entered the legal profession. He was a deep thinker and a voluminous writer. He makes twenty-five hundred references to the New Testament. Of these seven hundred are to the four gospels. He quotes from every chapter in Matthew, Luke and John. He was the first to introduce the phrase "New Testament" and the first of the fathers who wrote in Latin.

Clement of Alexandria was born about the middle of the second century and died in Alexandria about 215 A. D. He was an extensive traveller and early devoted himself to the study of philosophy becoming a proficient in the Stoic and Platonic philosophies. He was converted to Christianity through the influence of Pantænus, master of the Christian school at Alexandria, whom he succeeded. He was a man of profound learning and well able to sift carefully and impartially the evidence in regard to the New Testament; yet we find him, within a hundred years after the death of the Apostles and in an age when it was possible to trace the Christian history to its beginnings, accepting as genuine and authentic our four gospels. "He mentions Matthew, Mark, Luke and John by name, and places them in the order named. He makes three hundred and twenty references to the books of the New Testament in his works, which we have.

Origen (b. 186—d. 253 A. D.) of Alexandria in Egypt. He was a man of profound learning and thoroughly versed

in Greek philosophy and the Scriptures. He was the master of a Christian school in his city. In the Decian persecution he was subjected to exquisite torture of his body, but from his prison he wrote a letter of exhortation and encouragement to his fellow sufferers. "The writings of Origen were of many kinds, critical, philosophic, polemic and practical." His works on the Scriptures, and defence of them, cover more ground than those of any other ancient interpreter. "His most celebrated work is his *Apology for Christianity* contained in the eight books '*Against Celsus*.' This is regarded as the most complete defence of the Christian religion that has come down to us from the Ante-Nicene age." The testimony of Origen confirms the evidence of the preceding period—within which, indeed, half his life fell—as to the New Testament writings about which there was practical universal agreement in the Greek speaking and Latin speaking church.

Eusebius (b. 265—d. 340 A. D.) who is called *The Father of Ecclesiastical History*. He studied in Antioch. He was master of a Christian school in Cæsarea and later bishop of the church there. He was persecuted for his faith and imprisoned under Diocletian. Besides his *Ecclesiastical History* from which we get much information in regard to our New Testament books and the growth and expansion of the Christian church, he was a voluminous writer upon the Scriptures. He made a concordance of the four gospels and wrote commentaries on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Isaiah, the Psalms, etc. He also wrote a "*Treatise on the Fulfillment of Christ's Prophecies*" and many other works.

There were many other writings and writers not mentioned in this list bearing testimony to the authenticity of the New Testament books.

**The Canon.**—This word means pattern. It is used in the Christian church for the rule of faith and life. Since the time of Origen it has been applied to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments as being the recognized authority and court of appeal in regard to the Christian faith

and practice. The application of the term involves church recognition that the Scriptures are separated from all other literature in virtue of the authority that is lodged in them.

The New Testament canon. About the principal books and the large majority of the whole there was never any discussion; they were accepted from the first. About Second Peter, the Epistle to the Hebrews and one or two others there was some discussion before they were finally given their place. There were other books which claimed a place in the canon but their claims were finally rejected.

The criterion from the first was Apostolicity, immediate, or all but immediate connection with the apostles. Only those books were admitted to the canon which could be regarded as the most faithful records of the work of Christ and His apostles and as the suitable foundation of Christian preaching. These books we trace back through the independent testimony of able men who lived in all parts of the Roman Empire. We see in the writings of these men how great the agreement was upon this subject. "This agreement rested in the belief that the New Testament writings were the authentic embodiments of the witness and teaching of Christ and His apostles."

The history of the canon has been divided, by one writer, into three periods: 1. 70-170 A. D. during which the evidence—while in some respects fragmentary owing to the disappearance of many ancient works—is of wide range, direct, uniform and comprehensive. 2. 170-303 during which the available evidence is largely augmented and the consciousness of a collection of sacred books becomes more distinct. 3. 303-397 A. D. during which the canon formed the subject of deliberation and decree at great councils of the church.

In 303 during the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian, the sacred books were sought out as special objects for destruction.

Early manuscripts. When the Emperor Constantine came to the throne and Christianity became, through his decree,

the official religion of the empire he ordered, in 330 A. D., Eusebius—"The Father of Ecclesiastical History" and who had proved his ability for the task in his "Hexapla"—to have made, under his direction, fifty magnificent volumes—each one to contain the books of the Old and New Testament in the Greek tongue. These Bibles were made at the expense of the royal treasury. It is thought that the Codex Sinaiticus (the finding of which by Tischendorf reads like a romance) is one of these copies. This manuscript with the Codex Alexandrinus and the Codex Vaticanus, the three oldest and best preserved manuscripts which we have, were not available and could not be used by the translators of the King James version, but the differences between them and the hundreds of manuscripts used by the translators of that version are unimportant. This shows the great care which has been exercised through the centuries and from the beginning in transcribing the sacred books.

Versions. There were many versions made in different languages, which extend back to the second century. The history of these has an important bearing upon the faithfulness with which this story of the Christ has been transmitted to us, but even the partial telling of it would take another chapter. Enough—it may be—has been set down here, though only in a condensed and exceedingly brief form, to show how we have received our New Testament and its authenticity.

At any time the discovery of ancient manuscripts, now hidden away in some old library, may shed new and unexpected light upon the making of our New Testament.

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QUESTIONS

What can be said in regard to the first written documents? What appeal was made to them? What can be said of the transition period? The eye and ear witnesses? How did the New Testament books come to be written? Give the contents of the New Testament, the time of writing and the order of the books. What are the five historical books? Give, in order, the purpose in the writing of each book. How did Paul's Epistles come to be written? Give the four groups and the leading thought in each. How were the books used in the churches? How were the books used and corroborated by the Christian writers of the first three centuries? What is the testimony of the writers of the Sub-Apostolic Age? Clement of Rome? Ignatius? Polycarp? What is the testimony of the writers of the second century? Papias? Justin Martyr? Tatian? Irenæus? What is the testimony of the writers of the third century? Tertullian? Clement? Origen? Eusebius? What can be said of the canon? Its formation? The three periods?



## STUDY VIII

# THE CHURCH IN CONTROVERSY

### CAUSES

**The Twofold Conflict.**—In this study attention is called to the controversy in which the church was engaged with its enemies along the line of the argumentative reasons for and against the new faith. In the next study are considered some of the physical means—the persecutions—by which the opponents of Christianity sought to stamp it out of existence.

**The Fundamental Question** at issue was, “How far God, to save mankind, really and personally enters into human nature; in the one case, into the human race through the incarnation of the Word; in the other into the individual soul through the operation of the Spirit.”

The Christians claimed that God was incarnate in Jesus Christ and the sole basis of salvation is the grace of God through Jesus Christ to be appropriated by faith on the part of man. Acceptance of Christ radically changed a man's relations to Judaism, heathenism and the philosophy of the times; the advocates of which, however, did not propose to have their claims set aside without a struggle.

**Holiness and Exclusiveness.**—Christianity aimed at purity of heart and holiness of living. Many of the heathen religions not only allowed but fostered worldly lusts. “The era was one of corruption and unblushing vice; the gospel was unflinching in its disclosures, stern in its reproofs, terrible in its denunciation of the wrath of God” upon the doers of evil. The contrast between a religion which denounced evil and those which fostered it was very marked and aroused the bitter opposition of the latter. It

has been remarked that if the old gods worshipped by the Romans were now to appear upon earth in human form that, with their intrigues, they would not be received into decent society.

The exclusiveness of Christianity caused a deep seated antagonism to be manifested towards it. It claimed to be the one religion to the exclusion of all others. It had been declared of Jesus Christ, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4: 12). This assertion was revolutionary to the last degree to the Romans and Greeks who were accustomed to the worship of many gods and goddesses. The philosopher would take up arms at once against a religion which asserted that in it was absolute and certain truth. The magistrate would look with suspicion and dislike upon a religion which did not permit its followers to join in the public sacrifices and offer incense upon the altar of a god. Not to worship a deified Cæsar was an act of treason to the state.

**Unworldliness and Aggressiveness.**—The Roman and Greek social, business and political relations were so interwoven with the heathen religious customs and habits of the times that Christians, in order not to worship the pagan gods and goddesses, had often to withdraw themselves and stand apart. This gave rise to the charges of their being unworldly, morose and haters of their fellow men.

From the first Christianity has pushed its claims upon men. It has been aggressively missionary in its character. It would not consent to keep still, but attempted everywhere to win converts to itself. It was this enthusiastic zeal for bringing men into its fold which brought it into hostile contact with the Jews immediately after the resurrection of Christ and later on with the Roman magistrates. The heathen religions differed from the new faith in that they were tolerant and apathetic except where they saw they were likely to be overturned by Christianity and then they persecuted the new faith with a keen hostility.

Jesus Christ foretold the opposition which would be aroused by the preaching of the gospel and prepared His followers to meet and overcome it (John 15: 18-20; Matthew 5: 11, 12, 44; Luke 21: 12-19).

### THE ANTAGONISM OF JUDAISM

**Principles Involved.**—The attack of the Jews upon Christianity began with its founder, Jesus Christ, and resulted in His death upon the Cross. Long before the Romans had learned the distinction between the new faith and that having its seat in Jerusalem, the leaders of the Jews had clearly foreseen Christianity's radical and revolutionary tendencies. Judaism, at that time, was Pharisaism and Pharisaism was Judaism. They were synonymous terms and stood for a formal cut and dried system of legal righteousness. There was no heart in it and the spiritual life had taken its departure. The Pharisaic rules of religion were so many that it was impossible to observe them and this gave rise to hypocrisy. The Pharisees were looking for a great Messianic King who would subdue all nations and place them under Jewish rule. They had only contempt for the sinner. They were to be saved not because they were heart righteous but because of their relation to the Mosaic Law.

Jesus Christ completely shattered the Jewish idea of a great temporal kingdom. He predicted the destruction of the Temple and the Holy City. He based salvation upon repentance and heart righteousness and a proper spiritual relation to God. In the new kingdom which He preached the Jew had no superiority to the Gentile; they were equal in the sight of God. He declared Himself the fulfillment of the Prophets and the Law and the supreme sacrifice for sin. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." He asserted that the new kingdom of righteousness had come in Him and that the old must pass away.

**Early Manifestations.**—The antagonism of Judaism,

when the issue between the principles involved was clearly joined, manifested itself in many ways. The Jewish lawyers sought to entrap and confuse Christ by sharp practices; they asked Him catch questions in regard to His mission and work and endeavoured to bring Him into disrepute with His disciples and the multitude. Paul was followed wherever he went, upon his missionary tours, by Jewish calumniators.

There were two parties of Jews with which the church, after the ascension of Christ, came into sharp conflict.

First, there were the Jews who denied any and every claim of Christ to be the Messiah; of this class were the rioters who drove Paul out of city after city and sought to kill him in the Temple.

Second, there were the Jewish Christians who "asserted that their faith was Judaism with a new prophet; that the Law of Moses and Mosaic practices were binding on Christians as well as on unbelieving Jews; that Gentile believers must first become proselytes to Judaism before they could become Christians; and lastly that circumcision was the only gateway to baptism."

With the first class of Jews it was not so difficult to deal for they were out and out antagonists; but the Jewish Christians,—who still clung to the Mosaic Law—were constantly making trouble, not only amongst the Christian Jews who had fully come out from the dominion of the Law of Moses and expressed their faith in Christ, but also among the Christian Gentiles who had come out of the heathen religions. To meet this condition of affairs Paul presents his masterly arguments, in the Epistles to the Romans and Galatians, for justification by faith in Christ alone.

In the Epistle to the Galatians we look right in upon this great controversy and this epistle should be read carefully in this connection. In the churches founded by Paul in Galatia the converts at first did well, but soon Judaizing teachers found their way into them. They disparaged Paul and the gospel he preached. They declared that the

Mosaic Law was still binding upon all Christians. They insisted upon the rite of circumcision. Though they might acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the Messiah they still looked for salvation through the works of the Law. It was a great controversy, but Paul proved himself equal to the task of vindicating the gospel which he preached. He shows why and how he came to preach and that what he taught came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. He vindicates his authority, as an apostle, to teach. He treats of the relation of Christ to the Law and proves that justification is not through the deeds of the law but by faith in Him. The Galatian converts, he declares, had received the Spirit through faith and not through the law, why should they turn back? The Law is subordinate to faith. The covenant of the promise of Christ was before the Law and there is danger in returning to the Law. Paul very practically exhorts the Christian believers to stand fast in the liberty of Christ; this liberty excludes Judaism. While this conflict is practically dead so far as Judaism is concerned yet there are those still with us who try to buy their way to God by their good deeds; for such Paul's argument of the way to salvation through Jesus Christ, is still pertinent and makes this epistle glow with divine light.

**Later Manifestations.**—The year 70 A. D. marked the close of an old and the beginning of a new and sad era for the Jews. In that year Jerusalem and its Temple were destroyed. In the fearful scenes which took place some may have remembered that the Jewish multitude had cried out, when Jesus was before Pilate and he wished to release Him, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27: 25). Jesus had foretold the ruin of the city (Matthew 23: 37-39; 24) and had wept over it (Luke 19: 41-44; 23: 28-31). With the fall of the Holy City and Temple it was now no longer possible to keep the Jewish law. This was a powerful argument for the Christians which the Jews were unable to answer. But in many respects, while the conflict was practically coming to an end, the hatred of the

Jews for the Christians was intensified, henceforth the Christian in the eyes of the Jew was not merely a rival but a traitor, and the Gentile Christian was one who enjoyed the gains of treason at the Jew's expense. The animosity was intense; and to abuse the Christians, or to stir up the heathen to persecute them was a delight if not a duty to a Jew. Constantly in the persecutions we find the Jews prominent in the attack. There were literary attacks also on the Jewish side and these had to be met with the pen. The miraculous birth and the Divinity of Christ had to be maintained against denials and false insinuations. The spiritual meaning of types and prophecies and the superseding of the law by the gospel had to be explained. Christians had to make good their claim to be the true Israel of God. Some of the extant Greek writings of this type are the so called Epistle of Barnabas (c. 80-110 A. D.), Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho (c. 155 A. D.), the "*Demonstratio adversus Judæos*" of Hippolytus (c. 220 A. D.), and parts of Origen's "*Contra Celsum*" (249 A. D.). Latin writings in answer to the Jews are not so numerous as the Greek.

The Christian Apologists were the defenders of the Christian faith in a literary way, against both unbelieving Jew and heathen Gentile. Their work was first with the Jews as they were the first opponents of Christianity. They carried on the work begun by Paul and the New Testament writers. As many of the Apologists were converts from Judaism or Paganism they had knowledge of both sides of the case. They answered the charges made against the Christians, their sacred writings, their mode of living and their doctrines. In the beginning they wrote after the Scriptural style but soon they branched out into every literary form known to Paganism; and in time they captured the literary guns of their opponents and turned them against them. They pleaded for a fair hearing of their cause and sought to show that Christianity was not only the consummation of all that was good in Judaism but that it would satisfy the longing of all hearts after a true spiritual life.



The Apologists were sensible of the work which they had to do and varied it accordingly. They wrote in Greek and in Latin and the language used marks, as it has been said, a fundamental difference. "It is the difference which is summed up in contrast between Roman law and Greek thought. The instruments of the Greek Apologists were reason and philosophy; those of the Latin were rhetoric and law. The broad characteristics which distinguished Greek and Latin literature reappear here. In the one case the appeal is to what is universal, to the high aspirations and deep thoughts which the human mind in its freedom has anywhere reached. It is the gospel, rather than Judaism or heathenism, that sums up and satisfies all these. In the other case the appeal is to the rights of the individual, to social order, to common sense, and to law."

**The Result** of this controversy was that Judaism fell to the rear and Christianity came to the front.

### THE ANTAGONISM OF HEATHENISM

It was with heathenism—which represented so many things—that Christianity had its longest and most bitter conflict. In many ways that contest is not yet ended. The greatness of the victory, however, which the church won over the heathenism of the Roman empire may be seen in the statement of the points of difference. It should be remembered that in the beginning that this heathenism had every earthly advantage on its side; the imperial power, the philosophical schools, the literary classes, the social prestige and a great religious system supported by the empire. Christianity had only its faith in its Master and the system of truth which He taught.

**The Political Conflict.**—The Roman idea of the state was that it was everything and the individual nothing. The first question always was, "Is the state strong and prosperous?" The happiness or the unhappiness of the individual was not considered. The state was the highest good and

everything must be subordinated to it. The emperor, as the incarnation of the state and as the highest good, must be worshipped with divine honours.

Jesus Christ taught, in radical opposition, that the soul of one man is worth more than the whole world. He put the individual first and the state second. He declared that the state existed not to serve the rulers but the rulers the state. The greatest man is the one who renders the largest service. "Whosoever will be great among you let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief, let him be your servant."

"The Christian was loyal to the state, but for him the kingdom of God was the highest good. But the kingdom of God was not chiefly of this world. Therefore he could not worship the emperor. Here was a great and radical point of difference and upon which neither side would yield. The Christians' refusal to pay divine honours to the emperor caused them to be put under the ban and to be persecuted as enemies and traitors to the state. For nearly three hundred years the Roman empire exerted its strength to uphold, by the most radical means in its power, its contentions, but it had finally to yield—under the Emperor Constantine—to the Christians' ideal of the state."

**The Caste Conflict.**—The aristocratic proclivities of paganism were strongly intrenched. The curse of slavery was upon the whole empire; a slave was often counted as of less value than a domestic animal. Here again Christianity taught a revolutionary doctrine, that all men were of one blood and equally valuable in the sight of God. That a common slave should be "brother" to a haughty aristocrat who could trace his lineage back through a long line of illustrious ancestors, was an unheard of thing. Christ placed the emphasis not upon birth, breeding, splendid ancestors, wealth or position, but upon purity of heart, service and loyalty to God with all that these signified. The Christians were declared to be overturners and destroyers of a long established social order.

**The Religious Conflict.**—The people of the Roman empire were idolaters. There were many gods and goddesses worshipped in splendidly equipped temples. This worship was under the care of and provided for by the state. The nations conquered by the Romans had their gods with which they did not interfere. The magnificent images of the gods were everywhere and there were continual festivals and sacrifices in their honour. Christianity made its declaration that these gods and goddesses were naught, that they had no power or might, that there was only one true God and Jesus Christ His Son, who ought to be worshipped (1 Corinthians 8 : 4-6). For this the early Christians were called atheists and irreligious. Jesus had declared that "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4 : 24). Not only did the priests of the heathen religions declare war against the new faith, but the makers of shrines and images of the gods (Acts 19 : 24-29) were also up in arms against it.

**The Blood Revenge Conflict.**—Blood revenge was looked upon as the sacred and imperative duty of the nearest of kin. A man was under obligations to resent injuries to himself and his family. To the Roman it was a strange doctrine taught by the teachers who followed Christ that a man should forgive his enemies and do good to those who spitefully used him. The meekness and patience of Christians in the conflict, in which they were seemingly getting the worst of it, was a thing hard to be understood by the Romans.

**The Unending Conflict** with the evil in men's hearts was the most difficult of all in which to win for righteousness and God. It is to this contest that Paul refers in the Epistle to the Romans (1 : 18-23) and in which he declares "That the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Sensuality, with a host of attendant evils, had intrenched itself in the worship of the temples and groves—as the notorious one of Daphne at Antioch—and surrounded itself with every beautiful thing

to lure men to their destruction. This evil in men's hearts broke out in the church and had there to be dealt with by Paul, as seen in his epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 5-7).

**The Battle of the Ideals** of heathenism and Christianity was a strenuous one. From the very efforts of the Christians to promote purity of heart, righteousness of conduct, individual freedom in the state, right equality between man and man and proper worship of God, they were branded as atheists, as enemies of the state, as enemies of the whole human race and deserving, in the eyes of the law, of torture and death. Such was the bitter struggle for supremacy of the great political, social and religious ideals, which were to uplift and bless mankind through Jesus Christ.

### DOCTRINAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTROVERSIES

When Christianity was proclaimed the political, religious and social standpoints, as has been shown, were changed by it and this made it necessary to readjust the old to new lines of thought. It was in this readjustment process that the great doctrinal, literary and philosophical controversies arose.

There were three parties: 1. There were the strong advocates of the old order of things, who put forth every effort to preserve it. 2. There were the believers and promoters of the new faith and way, who could see no good in the old. 3. There were those who strove to mix the old with the new. Then in each of these three parties there were the radicals and the conservatives.

Only a few of these controversies can be considered—for lack of space—in this connection. They were all essentially literary, in that the arguments pro and con were reduced to writing and carefully wrought out by masters of the craft. Some of these writings we have in the original language in which they were written, some are in translations, some are

in quotations, of others only the names and titles have been preserved and many have probably perished.

**Doctrinal Controversies.**—These arose over differing conceptions of the truth in regard to God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, man, and their relations to each other and the world.

**Ebionism.**—This was a mixture of Christianity and Judaism. Its advocates held that the law of Moses was equal to the doctrine of Christ. They limited the divinity and omnipotence of Christ while showing great respect and regard for the dignity of His office as the Messiah and His conspicuous merits. They practiced the rite of baptism, observed the Lord's supper and kept the seventh day of the week. This doctrine was combatted by Paul, in that the Law of Moses was equal to the doctrine of Christ.

**Gnosticism** was "a natural result of the contact of Christianity with oriental and Greek philosophy, and was the earliest attempt to construct a philosophical basis of faith." It has also been defined as "an attempt to solve the great problems of theology by combining the elements of pagan mysticism with the Jewish and Christian traditions."

It undertook, among other things, to give an answer to the problem of the origin of evil. While it asserted its belief in one supreme God, it also taught that matter is essentially evil and the source of evil. As God is pure and good, God and matter must be antagonistic; the world could not have come directly from God. To bridge this chasm a whole crowd or chain of intermediate beings (the first coming from God) were conceived between God and matter or the world, "till at last the intangible and infinite was confined and curdled into actual matter, and the pure was darkened into evil." The lowest of the æons coming from God is the Demiurge who constructs the universe out of matter. Some of the teachings were "that spirit has become imprisoned in matter. The soul of man is imprisoned in his body. Christ the highest æon emanated from

God and liberated man's spirit from matter, but as the contact of matter with spirit is contamination Christ could not have had a human body, consequently His sufferings and death on the cross were only in appearance." The teaching that matter is evil played havoc with the simplest moral precepts, for if matter is evil and the source of evil man's sin is to be found not in his will but in his body. And this often led to an extreme asceticism—to reduce the power of evil—or extreme libertinism, for it was claimed, by some, that to overcome sensuality was to indulge in it. United with these teachings were often the narrowest thoughts of Jewish ceremonialism, insistence on circumcision and fast days, etc. It is due to the Gnostic teachers to say that the doctrine of intermediate beings between God and matter was devised by them to save God from being the author of evil. Redemption from sin, according to the Jewish idea, if matter is evil can come only through asceticism, hence the upholding of ceremonialism.

Paul combatted Gnosticism in his Epistle to the Colossians where the chief thought is, "The dignity and sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the Mediator and Head of all creation and the church." Christ is declared to be the only link between God and the universe. "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him." He is the only Mediator and Redeemer from sin (Colossians 1:20-29) and He has come in the flesh and suffered on the cross. Gnosticism failed in many ways, one of the chief of which was its unhistorical and almost purely speculative character; it aided, however, in the development of clear thought and definite statements in regard to Christian doctrines and the gospel, on the part of those who opposed it.

**Manichæism** was a mixture of Christianity, Parseeism, Babylonian mythology and other foreign elements. It was founded by Mani. It somewhat resembled Gnosticism. Its



problem was, the conflict of good and evil. "What is its origin? What is its solution?" It asserted that in the beginning there were two eternal principles—light and darkness. In the long struggle between them a portion of the light became imprisoned in the darkness which, in order to retain, the power of darkness made man in whom darkness and light are combined and who has been, ever since his creation, the victim of two utterly antagonistic principles the light and the darkness—good and evil. Matter is entirely bad and the soul must be entirely free. Christ comes in a seeming body and suffers a seeming death to redeem man and draw the particles of light to Himself. As matter is wholly bad man must help free himself by a strict æsceticism. Three seals were administered. "1. The seal of the mouth into which no evil thing must come such as animal food and out of which no evil thing, such as an impure word, must pass. 2. The seal of the hands which must do no evil things—such as are found in material and industrial pursuits. 3. The seal of the bosom which forbids all sensual gratification."

The answer to Manichæism is the same as that to Gnosticism. These two systems, with Ebionism, represent three of the many attempts to mix Christianity with other elements and the struggle of Christianity to get free from them and to clearly define its differences from them.

## PHILOSOPHICAL CONTROVERSIES

The mind of the Greek was essentially speculative. It is to him that we owe all the great ventures in the realm of philosophy. He attempted to solve the riddle of the universe. In Platonism—in the fourth century before Christ—spirituality reached its highest point. Plato taught that God is the creator of the universe and that man is a distinct personality; he also taught the eternity of matter and "a realm of ideas, the patterns or archetypes of all realities." "There is a difference between virtue and vice

both in nature and consequences. "This difference issues in future happiness for the good man and in future unhappiness for the bad man." Aristotle followed Plato rejecting some parts of his teaching and accepting other parts, but with all the efforts of these intellectual giants they were unable to make many things plain. Pyrrho—in the third century before Christ—is the forerunner of the Skeptics. He pointed out the fact of the disagreements among philosophers, which were common in his time, and declared that the problems of God, man and the universe were insoluble. "The true course was to make no positive statements on either side, since it is just as easy to prove one side as the other." The Epicureans were materialistic. The Stoics were pantheistic. The early Christian writers came in contact with the Stoics who held the stage during the first two centuries after Christ; amongst its followers were Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. The doctrines of the Skeptics were also prevalent.

Philosophy had done its best, however, and had failed to satisfy the mind of man. When Christ came "there was deep longing for some eternal verity—instead of speculations—upon which mankind could rest and build its hopes. Philosophy, statesmanship, the heathen religions had all done their best to meet the necessities of the real man. Morality, however, had become lax, vice prevailed, souls that had not become insensible were tormented with remorse. In the face of death there was dark resignation, or utter hopelessness, or outbursts of wrath against the gods."

Christianity presented not only the highest spiritual and ethical conceptions but professed to teach the ultimate philosophy and to be the eternal truth. It began to make its way with great gains from all classes of people and to satisfy not only the spiritual but the moral and intellectual longings of mankind.

Now, however much the various schools of philosophy might differ from each other or give up in despair the riddle of existence, none of them fancied having Christianity take

the field from them. Then began the philosophical attacks upon Christianity and when these failed attempts were made to make it conform its teachings to some philosophical system or adapt some philosophical system to it. Here again good results came to Christianity, for it was led to make clear statements in regard to itself.

**The Skeptics' Controversy With and Attack Upon Christianity.**—The skeptics date back to Pyrrho. They had, in the past, ridiculed polytheism and had declared that philosophy could not satisfy man and now they turned their attention—in the second century after Christ—to Christianity.

Celsus, the most important opponent, had thoroughly studied both Judaism and Christianity, but entirely without sympathy. There is not an argument to-day which is brought against Christianity which was not urged by him—in some form—and put with all the ability and plausibility of which he was so capable. His book—"A True Discourse"—was especially aimed at "the divinity of Christ, His virgin birth, His miracles and His resurrection." He was answered very ably by Origen in his "Eight Books against Celsus." This able exponent of Christianity was one of the most learned men of his times and not only thoroughly versed in the Scriptures but also in Greek philosophy.

Lucian. He had an exceedingly critical mind. He was a searcher after flaws. He was satirical and biting in his arguments, withal he was thoroughly versed in the learning of his day. "He regarded Christ as a crucified Sophist." He held up to scorn the doctrine of the brotherhood of man—one of the chief glories of Christianity. He said, "They—the Christians—have persuaded themselves that they are all brethren."

**The Neoplatonists' Attack Upon Christianity.**—Neoplatonism represents one of the last and most vigorous protests of philosophy against the new faith. It not only protested, but it set up a system of its own. It armed itself

with weapons from every source. Plotinus, the founder (205-270 A. D.), had his school in Rome. "This school was in its essence religious rather than scientific. It starts from a transcendental conception of God from which it develops the universe. The process is emanation and absorption. The world is an overflow from God and its ultimate goal reabsorption in God. There are three stages in the process of overflow—spirituality, animality, and corporeality. There are also three stages in the process of reabsorption—sensible perception, reasoning and mystical intuition. In the overflow there are three distinctions of being—intellect with its ideas; soul with its notions; body with its forms." In man are intellect, soul, body. The intellect entices the soul to the intellectual life, to contemplation and reabsorption in God—losing its individuality. The body entices the soul on the other hand to a base life in matter. The soul has its choice, but even to choose the highest is to lose its individuality. At its best estate Neoplatonism presented few attractions and really at no time was a formidable foe to Christianity. In the conflicts which ensued it was drawn more and more into polytheism and ceased finally to exert any influence.

Porphyry (233-300 A. D.), a pupil of Plotinus in the best period of Neoplatonism, proved himself a dangerous enemy of Christianity on account of his exceedingly able and bitter attacks upon it. He made a thorough study of the Scriptures and doctrines of the new faith and with all the learning and adroitness he possessed—and he was a master—he sought to overturn it. Yet he failed—as the other philosophers had—to check the steady advance of the gospel and its winning power over the hearts of men.

### CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

Christian literature was occupied with a threefold task—the setting forth of the new faith, the defence of it against its enemies, and in attacking false system of religion, philos-

ophy and the evils of the age. In the first three hundred years we find amongst its writers some of the ablest intellectual men of the times. These writers—close to the great historical movement which has so blessed the world—did their task well. They have been classified as follows:

**New Testament Writers.**—(See chapter 7, “The Church in the Books.”)

**The Apostolic Fathers**, such as Clement of Rome, Ignatius and Polycarp. The title was given to those who had or were supposed to have had some personal connection with the apostles.

**The Apologists** (see Apologists’ section in this study).—Some of the ablest of these were: (a) Quadratus and Aristides. Quadratus was bishop of the Church of Athens, “he was a disciple of the apostles” and presented about 126 A. D., a discourse to the Emperor Hadrian in defence of the Christian faith. In it he speaks of some persons who had been miraculously healed by Christ as surviving to his age. Aristides, called “our philosopher,” by Jerome also addressed a defence of the faith to the emperor. (b) Justin Martyr who addressed apologies to the Emperors Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. He also addressed one to the Jews. (c) Melito, he is credited by Eusebius with eighteen works. (d) Tatian, he wrote discourses to the Greeks and composed a “Diatesseron.” (e) Athenagoras, he addressed an “Embassy concerning the Christians” to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. (f) Theophilus and Minucius Felix.

**The Polemics.**—We have here a class of men who were engaged in defending the church from attack within its own borders. Two of the leaders were: Irenæus—bishop of Lyons—who wrote a work “Against Heresies” and Hippolytus whose chief book was “Refutation of all Heresies.”

**The Alexandrian School.**—It was in the great city of Alexandria and in this centre of the thought of the times, that Christianity had its highest intellectual development.

The three men who wrought here with power for the up-building of Christianity—in the first three hundred years of its existence—were Pantænus—a convert from Stoicism—Clement, who succeeded Pantænus about 199 A. D., and Origen (185–253 A. D.). They were all masters of the art of effective writing and were able to meet on their own ground the keenest philosophers of their day. Origen especially was a voluminous writer, he is credited with being the author of hundreds of volumes. One of his works was “First Principles” an attempt at a systematic explanation of Christian doctrine. There are four parts or books “God and creation; Creation and Providence; Man and Redemption; and the Holy Scriptures.”

**The North African Fathers.**—The two principal men to which the church owes so much for its Latin Christian literature were Tertullian and Cyprian (of the third century after Christ). They were both able lawyers and were converted after they had begun to practice their profession. Tertullian threw himself into the defence and exposition of Christianity with all the ardour of his fiery nature. He was a voluminous and able writer.

There were many other writers, of martyrologies, of Christian life and practice, etc.

Some of the arguments which appealed most strongly to the heathen were the joy which the Christians manifested in the exercise of their faith and in the pure and consistent lives which they lived.



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## QUESTIONS

State some of the causes of the conflict. The twofold nature. The fundamental question. What can be said of the antagonism of Judaism? The principles involved? Early and later manifestations? Who were the Christian apologists? What can be said of the antagonism of heathenism? The political conflict? The caste conflict? The religious conflict? The blood revenge conflict? The unending conflict? The battle of ideals? What can be said of the doctrinal and philosophical controversies? What were the doctrinal controversies? Ebionism? Gnosticism? Manichæism? What were the philosophical controversies? The Skeptics? The Neoplatonists? Give an account of Christian literature. What can be said of the New Testament writers? The Apostolic Fathers? The Apologists? The Polemics? The Alexandrian School and the North African Fathers?

## STUDY IX

### THE CHURCH IN PERSECUTION

#### THE OCCASION

**The Causes** which resulted in the conflict of the religious and philosophical conceptions and gave rise to the literary controversies—set forth in Study VIII—also produced the persecutions.

Where persuasion and argument failed the Jews and Romans tried brute force to suppress the new faith. This extreme resort to physical compulsion, in order to change the belief of men, showed the fatal weaknesses of the old systems.

**The Clash** was inevitable: "With the Jew because Christianity claimed to supersede the law and to rob the chosen people of their privileges by throwing open salvation to all mankind; and also with the heathen because Christianity was an innovation 'an imperium in imperio,' a religion which claimed to be both universal and exclusive and which condemned and opposed all other religions, including those forms of worship imposed and sanctioned by the state."

Christianity was a religion of "no-compromise." Its advocates rather than yield their faith in Christ and in the matter of worshipping the Roman Emperor, the heathen gods and goddesses, and indulging in the immoralities of many of their groves and temples, endured imprisonments, tortures, and death by wild beasts, by drowning, by beheading and by burning.

**The Heroic Elements** of the Christian life were called out by the oppressive measures used. Religion was a warfare in every sense of the word. Whosoever became a Christian during the long years of persecution did so at the risk of losing his property and life. The Christian camp

was in the presence of the enemy. The call for service was often of the hardest kind and of that sort in which soldiers are sometimes obliged—for the good of the whole army—to hold a position and to endure a destructive fire of the enemy without being permitted to reply to the firing or to charge their foes. The test was that of suffering, endurance and waiting.

**The Creed**, which gave an occasion for the persecutions, was well known. It was proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2 : 38, 39 ; comp. 4 : 12), by Stephen when he was martyred (Acts 6 : 14 ; 7 : 55, 56), by Paul in his speeches and in his epistles (Acts 26 : 6-29 ; Romans 1 : 3-6 ; 1 Corinthians 2 : 1-16 ; Philippians 2 : 5-11), and by the apostles and disciples everywhere. It was all about Christ. If a Christian was arrested for his faith, all he had to do was to abjure the name of Christ and throw a little incense upon a pan of fire, before an image of the emperor or some heathen god and he was at once released.

How closely, however, the great essential matters of belief were adhered to in the midst of the age of persecution is shown by the account of "The Christian Creed" given by Irenæus (born in Smyrna 135 and died as Bishop of Lyons about 202 A. D.) in his book "Against Heresies" (c. 181 A. D.). He writes as follows: "The church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: (she believes) in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advent and the birth from a Virgin, and the passion and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven, in the flesh, of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His (future) manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father to gather all things in one, and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human

race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord and God, and Saviour, and King, according to the will of the invisible Father, every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess to Him, and that He should execute just judgment towards all ; that He may send spiritual wickedness and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly and unrighteous and wicked and profane among men, into everlasting fire ; but He may, in the exercise of His grace, confer immortality on the righteous and holy, and those who have kept His commandments, and have persevered in His love, some from the beginning (of their Christian course), and others from (the date of ) their repentance, and may surround them with everlasting glory."

### THE JEWISH PERSECUTIONS

**Their Origin** was in the claims of Christ for Himself and of His followers for Him. The Jews would have been well content to receive Christ as a great teacher or a political Messiah. They would gladly have made Him their king (John 6 : 15) to lead them to victory over other peoples and to replace the Roman by a Jewish empire, but the greater spiritual Kingdom of God, presented by Christ, they seemed to fail to comprehend. With a waning spirituality, they were filled with the idea of a magnificent temporal and earthly kingdom. Certainly Jesus Christ, in every way, sought to turn the eyes of Israel to the larger vision of the universal everlasting nature of His kingdom, but they would have none of it. How futile was the plan of a great temporal kingdom was seen when the Jews revolted and had their city and temple destroyed by Titus in 70 A. D., and again were crushed by the Emperor Hadrian, when they rose in an insurrection (in 131 A. D.) under the false Messiah Bar-Cokheba. But while warning the nation of the danger of rejecting Him and entreating the people to turn to Him, Christ abated no claim to be The Messiah, pre-

dicted by the prophets, and The Son of God. It may be said to be doubtful if Christ would have been condemned to death if He had not affirmed that He was The Christ before the high priest Caiaphas and before the Sanhedrin in answer to direct questions whether He was the Christ or not. The high priest asked Him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am; and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14: 61-64; Matthew 26: 63-66; Luke 22: 67-71).

**Extent and Time.**—The persecutions began in Jerusalem, in the crucifixion of Christ; they continued after His resurrection in the Jews haling the apostles before the magistrates and in imprisoning them for speaking and teaching in His name (Acts 4: 1-21; 5: 18-42). They broke out afresh upon the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7: 52-60; 8: 1-4) led by Saul. When Saul was converted the Jews never ceased to harass him in every city in which they were strong enough to do so.

The time of the persecutions of the Jews was, however, quite limited. After 70 A. D. they ceased to be of much consequence, not because the bitterness of their spirit was taken away, but because through the destruction of their holy city their power to do harm was seriously weakened.

**The Conduct of the Persecuted.**—They adopted and kept the policy of non-resistance. Put in prison and beaten with stripes they manifested no spirit of revenge. Their chief care was to again go and preach the gospel (Acts 4: 18-20). The increase in the stress and bitterness of the persecution only scattered the disciples abroad preaching Christ in other regions (Acts 8: 1). With Paul to be driven from one city was immediately to seek another.

## THE ROMAN PERSECUTIONS

**The Policy of the Empire.**—An attempt was made by the Romans to bind their people together by a religion

The necessity for a universal religion was felt from the fact of the political unity which had been accomplished by force of arms. The unity of the state required a common religion to create a common tie amongst the heterogeneous populations of which the empire was composed. This universal-made-to-order-political-religion was an eclectic one—a patch-work—taking elements from this and that national religion with a deified emperor at the head to whom was paid divine honours. It was a religion in which vice—in “the mysteries”—often clothed itself in the mantle of worship and made religion its servant; hence the awful immoralities prevalent in society of which Roman writers tell us.

The worship of the Roman emperor was the one form of worship, however, which was coextensive with the empire. It was the most real in the provinces where the emperor was personally unknown. It had nothing whatever to do with the good or bad character of the man who occupied the seat of the Cæsars. The worst of the emperors—as embodiments of the power of the empire—were deified. Thus the national religion, when Christianity began its work, was divorced from virtue and morality. “Philosophy also gave no help to morality for it had become sceptical and materialistic in its tone and doubted or denied the existence of a spiritual world and the value of moral virtue.”

Not to worship the image of the emperor was considered an act of treason to the state and was to be punished accordingly.

**The Attitude of Christianity.**—It at once claimed to be the universal religion—the consummation of Judaism—and to supersede all other forms of religion, in the empire, which were dust and ashes, dead and done with. Christ had commanded His disciples “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28 : 19). Paul declared in his speech before the Athenians, “And the times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17 : 30, 16-34).



It set up a new kingdom (Matthew 6 : 33) and commanded the allegiance of all men to a divine King first, and before that of the Roman empire and its emperor. It declared that any "law of the empire which conflicted with the principles of the church must give way." It demanded of men not only the purity of an outward living but also that of the heart.

"From a practical point of view what was of still greater moment than the campaign against the world and the worship of the gods, was the campaign against the apotheosis of men. This struggle which reached its height in the uncompromising rejection of the imperial cultus, marked at the same time the resolute protest of Christianity against the blending of religion and patriotism, and consequently against that cultus of the state in which the state (personified in the emperor) formed itself the object of the cultus. One of the cardinal aims and issues of the Christian religion was to draw a sharp line between the worship of God and the honour due to the state and its leaders. Christianity tore up political religion by the roots."

**The Joining of the Issue.**—At first the Romans did not persecute the Christians because they were not awake to the radical nature of their teachings. Christianity was supposed to be a sect of Judaism and Judaism was a national religion and under the protection of the empire. While the Jews really took the same stand as the Christians against the worship of the emperor, as a god, yet this was not made a ground of accusation and persecution, because Judaism was practically limited—in its scope—to the Jews.

It was the active and zealous missionary work of the Christians which brought them into conflict with the Roman cultus. Men of all nations began to embrace Christianity and, rejecting the worship of the heathen gods and the emperor, to declare their allegiance to a Higher Power than that of the empire. It was Christ or Cæsar.

The boasted toleration and liberality of the empire had certain fixed limits. Had the Christians been willing to enter

with a religion which would take its place with a hundred or so of other religions there would have been no persecution, but it claimed to be the one true faith and for that claim it had to suffer. It was a Roman principle that men must have no gods not sanctioned by law. The Christians were guilty of a double offense—they strove by every means to persuade citizens to abandon the worship sanctioned by Roman law and to introduce rites not sanctioned by it. Christianity was a perpetual menace to the government and to its religion and the “allowed religions” and it was silently and rapidly extending itself through every province of the empire. “Already its members were coming into collision with Imperial ordinances, and neither remonstrance nor punishment could induce them to give way. They spoke among themselves of a kingdom to which they belonged, and of a King to whom they owed an allegiance which superseded their obligations to the emperor. Far reaching as was the Imperial arm, here was a sphere in which it seemed to be paralyzed. It could quell a rebellion in Persia or in Britain but at the very gates of the palace was a power which baffled it. This power had its officials—often men of no position in the world—who in their own community were more than a match for the emperor himself. They were his subjects and he could take their lives. But no sooner was one official executed than another took his place. The man was gone but the system went on as before. Hostility to the church engendered by conservatism and intensified by suspicion reached a climax when experience proved that neither argument nor ridicule nor repressive measures served to check Christianity. The heathen in their turn became afraid.

“The persecutions which began in ignorance and dislike were continued in hatred and in fear. The chief motive of the worst attacks on the Christians was neither wantonness, nor contempt, nor cruelty but terror. Pagan society felt itself in the meshes of a net, whose steadily increasing extent and strength had baffled all attempts to destroy it. It was this

feeling of failure and helplessness against an unknown power which exasperated the masses in the first half of the persecutions and the officials in the second half. In both cases the heathen were well aware that they had every advantage on their side—authority, rank, wealth, education, numbers, tradition, physical force. And yet in spite of all these they were not victorious. They had lost much and gained nothing; and they were frantic at the prospect of defeat. There is no cruelty more reckless than that which is born of terror; and it was frenzy of this kind which often inspired the savage outcries and diabolical legal proceedings against the Christians.”

The Penalties, inflicted upon the Christians, were in accord with well and long established Roman laws. The large claims of Christianity brought it within the clutches of these laws. The empire was not so tolerant or so easy going as it has sometimes been made to appear. The Roman magistrates could inflict a great variety of punishments, all according to law and the view which they desired to take of Christianity. “It might be treated as an unlicensed religion, or as high treason, or as sacrilege, or as magic; perhaps also as incest. Introducers of new religions, if of good birth, were to be banished to an island; otherwise they were to be put to death. Those guilty of high treason, if of good birth, were to be beheaded; if not to be exposed to the beasts or burned alive. In either case they might be tortured. Sacrilege was similarly punished, with the additional alternative of crucifixion, but with the exclusion of torture in the case of citizens. Magic was punishable with exposure to wild beasts, burning or crucifixion; incest with banishment. Such a combination of crimes—which were wrongfully ascribed to the Christians—in one and the same set of men made the Roman officials intolerant.” The penalties were often inflicted with the utmost cruelty without regard to age or sex. In the great Coliseum at Rome, the sufferings of the Christians were made to serve as amusements for the Roman populace.

**Extent and Time.**—The scope of the persecutions was coextensive with the empire. The time was about three hundred years—from Christ to the Emperor Constantine. While the laws might be invoked at any time and the penalties enforced, as they were, with the utmost vigour for years at a time, yet there were periods again and again when no action was taken and the Christians were left alone in their religious beliefs.

**The Ten Persecutions.**—This has been the common number usually spoken of by writers upon this subject and this custom is followed here for the convenience of the arrangement. There were really fewer great persecutions and very many more lesser ones. The persecutions differed much also in their character, aim and intensity; for instance, “those under Nero and Domitian were capricious outbursts of cruelty and tyranny and those under Decius, Valerian and Diocletian were systematic attempts to extinguish Christianity throughout the empire. But at any time any Christian might be accused before a Roman magistrate and suffer the extreme penalty for his faith.” Justin Martyr tells this story—which was not an uncommon occurrence—“a wife was accused by her husband of being a Christian. She got the trial postponed; and he then accused Ptolemæus, her instructor. In court Ptolemæus was merely asked, ‘Are you a Christian?’ He said, ‘Yes,’ and was at once sentenced to death. One Lucius remonstrated with the prefect for condemning a man simply for being a Christian. ‘You also seem to be one,’ was the reply; and on his admitting it, he too was sentenced to death. And then a third came forward and was likewise punished.” This was done in the reign of the Emperor Trajan and Justin Martyr adds that he expected to be denounced and condemned himself.

**1. By Nero** (emperor A. D. 54–68. Special years of persecution A. D. 64–68).—An account of this time of trial has been given in Study IV—see sections, “The First Great Roman Persecution” and “The Numbers and Suffering of

the Christians." Paul perished in this persecution. The rapid spread of the faith, the numbers of the Christians in Rome, at this early period, and the fearful sufferings to which they were subjected are attested by the Roman historian Tacitus.

The successors of Nero were Galba, A. D. 68, Otho, Vitellius, A. D. 69, Vespasian, A. D. 69-79, Titus, A. D. 79-81.

2. **By Domitian** (emperor A. D. 81-96. Special years of persecution A. D. 95, 96).—Domitian was of a suspicious and tyrannical nature and he made a direct attack upon Christianity. From the refusal of the Christians to pay honour to the gods of Rome they were charged with being atheists. Flavius Clemens, the uncle of the emperor, is said to have suffered martyrdom while Domatilla, Clemens' wife, was banished on a similar charge. "Their sons, the presumptive heirs to the throne, were brought up by a Christian mother." (For description of the catacomb of Flavia Domatilla see Study V, section "Groups.") So soon did Christianity attract to itself many in high position in the empire. So strong had the Christians become in numbers and in asserting the Kingship of Christ and His right to rule and reign over all men that Domitian pressed the persecutions and "becoming apprehensive of the appearance of a 'Son of David' as a rival claimant of his throne (so Eusebius relates) he caused vigorous inquiries to be made in Palestine, which led to the apprehension of the grandsons of Jude, the Lord's brother (Mark 6 : 3). The simplicity, however, of the garb and demeanour of these men and the marks of labour on their horny hands convinced the tyrant that he had nothing to fear from them." So little did this emperor comprehend the nature of the great invisible spiritual kingdom of Christ.

The successor of Domitian was Nerva, A. D. 96-98.

3. **By Trajan** (emperor A. D. 98-117. Special years of persecution A. D. 104-117).—As the years passed the attitude of the empire towards Christianity became more

clearly defined. The more loyal the emperor was to the old forms of worship and the old gods the more bitter the persecution. Trajan was one of the great emperors who sought to uphold the Roman prestige. He was compelled to define the position of the empire upon Christianity even more closely than his predecessors. This was due to the fact of the still increasing numbers of Christians. We get great light upon this matter and period from a letter written about A. D. 112 by the governor, Pliny, the younger—of the province of Bithynia—to the Emperor Trajan. He was in great doubt in regard to what ought to be done when so many people in his province had become Christians. Pliny writes (only extracts from the letter are here quoted), "Indeed the matter seemed to me to be a proper one for consultation chiefly on account of the number of persons imperilled. For many of all ages and all ranks, aye, and of both sexes, are being called and will be called in danger. Nor are cities only permeated by the contagion of this superstition, but villages and country parts as well." He goes on to suggest that if milder measures were used it might be possible to help matters; so little did even he comprehend the nature of Christ's kingdom and think that its growth could be checked by means at his command.

In regard to the manner of the inquiry into the Christian faith of the accused and the harshness of the punishment meted out upon the open profession of Christianity, he says, "Meanwhile in the case of those who have been brought before me in the character of Christians, my course has been as follows: I put it to themselves whether they were or were not Christians. To such as professed that they were I put the inquiry a second and a third time, threatening them with the supreme penalty. Those who persisted I ordered to execution." He says further that the very handling of this matter caused it to spread and that many were accused of being Christians before his tribunal. Of some of the methods used in obtaining evidence he declares that "This made me think it all the more necessary to inquire, even by



torture, of two maid servants who were styled deaconesses, what the truth was." Desiring to test certain persons he says that he caused the statue of the emperor to be introduced amongst the images of the gods and required them to worship and to offer wine and incense before them—"none of which things it is said can such as are really and truly Christians be compelled to do." (For the belief of the Christians of which Pliny gives an account, see Study VI, section "Form of Public Worship.")

In reply to this letter the Emperor Trajan lays down three principles of action. 1. "Christians are not to be sought out; but if formally accused and convicted, they are to be punished." We notice here, after all, the strictness of the command and the ease with which it could be made the means of bringing torture and death to the Christians under magistrates who wished no leniency to be shown them. The principle was laid down that to be a Christian was to be a criminal. 2. "Those who deny that they are Christians and worship 'our gods' are to be pardoned no matter how suspicious their past history may have been." The way of apostasy was made easy. 3. "Anonymous accusations must not be accepted." This is the saving clause, which greatly aided the Christians. Still Christianity stood in the place of an illegal religion and its followers were constantly in danger of death. By this decree they were, however, to have the benefit of a legal trial. Trajan's purpose was evidently to put down Christianity by being both firm and conciliatory.

In the many martyrdoms that took place one of the most conspicuous was that of Ignatius (bishop of Antioch about 69 A. D.). He is said to have known the apostles and to have been with Polycarp a hearer of John, the apostle. He surrendered himself to the Emperor Trajan, when he passed through Antioch on his way to an expedition against the Parthians. "After a brief and contemptuous examination Trajan ordered him to be sent to Rome, there to be exposed to beasts in the amphitheatre." (For a brief account of the

writings of Ignatius, see Study VII, section "Early Christian Writers.")

The successors of Trajan were Hadrian (A. D. 117-138) and Antoninus Pius (A. D. 138-161). Hadrian wrote to Minucius Fundanus, proconsul of Asia Minor, that a firm adherence to their profession—which he calls "obstinacy"—on the part of the Christians should be punished. The bishop of Rome suffered martyrdom and other martyrdoms are reported, but Hadrian was hardly serious enough to be a great persecutor. "He aspired to be an agreeable man, an amateur philosopher and a patron of art and literature." When the Jews—in his reign—revolted under the false Messiah Bar-Cokheba, the Christians took no part in the rebellion. For this reason, doubtless, when Jerusalem was rebuilt under its new name, *Ælia Capitolina*, the Christians were allowed to live there while the Jews were excluded. Antoninus Pius' reign is generally regarded as a peaceful one for the Christians. Yet "the church was harassed, especially in the distant provinces of the empire, by those who persisted in attributing all calamities, such as earthquake, inundation and pestilence, to the Christians."

4. By Marcus Aurelius (emperor A. D. 161-180. Special years of persecution, the whole period of his reign.)—This was the most tragic and prolonged period of persecution which the church had yet experienced. A systematic attempt was made to crush out Christianity under the direct command of the emperor. "A new order was also laid down that informers were to receive the property of the condemned Christians. The results were hideous. The mines were crowded with prisoners. Torture and bloodshed went on continually in Asia, Byzantium, Africa and Gaul." The narrative of the fiery trial of the Christians in Gaul was written by some of the sufferers—and is preserved by Eusebius. This persecution has scarcely a parallel in the records of martyrdom for cruelty as well as for the number and heroism of its victims. The names of many of the martyrs have been preserved. Among them are:

Pothinus, bishop of Lyons, Sanctus, native of Pergamos, Attalus, a noble Roman, Maturus, Vettius Epagathus. Others illustrious martyrs were Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and disciple of John the apostle and Justin Martyr (see Study VII, section "Early Christian Writers" for a further account of these men). It was also a time of a great and fierce literary assault upon the Christians by such writers as Lucian, Cresceus and Celsus.

Yet the Emperor Marcus Aurelius was a philosophic moralist, a patron of the Stoics. He has been called the last and the best product of the pagan civilization. He wrote such sentiments as these: "Who can change the opinions of men," "And without change of sentiments what can you make but reluctant slaves and hypocrites," "Men were made for men," "correct them, then, or endure them," "correct them if you can," "If not remember that patience was given you to practice for their good."

Many explanations have been given to account for his fiery persecuting zeal; some declare that he took evil counsel from certain men, and others say that there was some personal offense, but the simplest and best explanation seems to be, "that he saw more deeply into the reality of things than his predecessors; his philosophy taught him that a kingdom whose basis was human self-sufficiency and pride could not coexist with the kingdom of Christ, and as a moralist he revolted from a doctrine which assured him that his morals were useless either to regenerate, to strengthen, or to console."

The church was helped rather than weakened by these assaults by the power and intellect of Rome. Never had she been quite so fearless and spoken in so triumphant a tone.

The successors of Marcus Aurelius were Commodus (A. D. 180-192), Pertinax, Didius Julianus (A. D. 193). Under Commodus the persecutions before long ceased and the churches had rest. One noble martyr is recorded, Apollonius, a Roman senator, who was beheaded. Marcia, who

became empress in 183 A. D., was favourable to the Christians and procured the release of many who, for their faith had been condemned to the horrors of the mines of Sardinia. It was a time of peace and revival for the church. But this very revival of the church and the stirring of men to think of the new life helped to revive a dying Paganism and gave rise to new struggles.

5. By **Septimius Severus** (emperor A. D. 193-211. Special years of persecution A. D. 200-211).—At first this emperor was friendly to Christianity because he had been cured of some malady by a Christian slave, *Proculus*. The Imperial favour, however, was before long withdrawn from the Christians and in 202 A. D. the emperor issued a new edict forbidding his subjects to become converts either of Judaism or Christianity. It is thought that the able defense of Christianity and the attacks upon heathenism by the Christian writers of this time, together with the rapidly increasing numbers of the Christians had much to do with the issuing of the new edict. The father of the celebrated Origen, Leonides of Alexandria, was one of the first victims of the new law. Origen then only seventeen years of age wanted to share the martyrdom of his father, but was prevented. He however wrote his father a letter, when he was about to be martyred. In this letter speaking for the family—"a wife about to be left a widow with seven children, fatherless and poor, the martyr's property being confiscated by the state"—he said, "look to it that thou dost not change thy mind on our account." In Carthage the persecution raged with great fierceness and there were many heroic examples of martyrdom both of men and women.

The successors of Septimius Severus were Caracalla, A. D. 211-217, Macrinus, A. D. 217, Elagabalus, A. D. 218-222, Alexander Severus, A. D. 222-234. Caracalla was of an evil character himself yet he issued an edict permitting the return of all who had been exiled for any crime; under this edict many Christians returned to their homes. Elagabalus attempted to introduce sun-worship and desiring tolera-

tion for this new form of worship forbore to persecute the Christians. Alexander Severus was one of the great emperors. His mother, Julia Mamæa had for one of her friends and counsellors the celebrated Origen, and Christian influences entered into the training of her son. While not a convert the emperor honoured the name of Christ. He caused to be engraved on the walls and public monuments of Rome the gospel precept, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them likewise." He failed however to legalize Christianity. He was slain in his thirtieth year.

6. **By Maximinus** (emperor A. D. 235-237. Special years of persecution, the same).—He was a brawny Thracian and reversed the policy of Alexander Severus whom he had murdered. He was a persecutor of the worst kind and many Christians were exiled and many killed.

The successors of Maximinus were Gordian I, II, III, A. D. 238-243, Philip the Arabian, A. D. 244-249. Gordian stayed the hand of persecution. The reign of Philip was a time of rest for the church. These emperors lived away from Rome and neglected Roman customs.

7. **By Decius** (emperor A. D. 249-251. Special years of persecution, the same).—When the Roman legions revolted against Philip, they compelled Decius, who was sent to quell the revolt, to assume the purple and Philip was slain. Decius came as a reformer. It seemed to him that the best way to carry out his reforms was to restore the old order of things and with it the worship of the heathen gods. To regain the favour of the national gods he deemed it necessary to extirpate Christianity; this attack was similar to that of Marcus Aurelius only it was more systematically carried out. Accordingly, "In every town throughout the empire a day was appointed on which sat a court of inquiry composed of a magistrate and five of the chief citizens, before which all persons suspected of Christianity were to be summoned, to be commanded to renounce their religion and to offer sacrifices. Imprisonment and death followed re-

fusal." The results of this action were threefold. 1. There were great numbers of Christians who confirmed their faith and—marvellous witnesses for the kingdom—went gladly to their death. Cyprian, writing of the state of affairs in Carthage—and there are parallel accounts of other cities—says: "Unasked they ran to the forum, of their own accord they hastened to death, as if all along they had been wishing for this, as if they were embracing an opportunity which they had always desired. How many had then to be put off by the magistrates because evening was coming on! How many even begged that their destruction might not be delayed!" 2. There were those who abandoning their property fled to the deserts—thus giving rise to the monastic movement. 3. Since the church had had rest from 238–249 A. D. numbers of persons had come into its fold who were not really Christians and hence there were those who apostatized and offered sacrifice to the heathen gods. The general name of "The Lapsed" was given to these. The heads of the churches in Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria and other cities were cruelly tortured or killed—and often tortured before they were killed. But Decius failed in his efforts and Christianity only took a stronger hold.

The successors of Decius were Gallus, A. D. 251–253, and Æmilianus, A. D. 253. After the death of Decius there was a short respite for the church, but the persecutions soon began again.

8. **By Valerian** (emperor A. D. 253–260. Special years of persecution A. D. 257–260).—During the first five years of his reign Valerian showed great favour to the Christians. There were many of this faith in his household. But persuaded by Macrianus—described by Eusebius as "master and chief ruler of the Egyptian magi,"—the emperor issued a persecuting edict. He ordered that Christian congregations should be prevented from meeting and that they should be deprived of their bishops. One result was that the banished bishops turned missionaries and spread Christianity and that their influence at home was increased.



Soon another edict in 258 A. D. was issued which was very drastic in its provisions. "It commanded that all bishops, presbyters, and deacons should be put to death; that all senators and magistrates should lose their property and rank, and then, if they refused to abjure Christ, they should be put to death; and that members of the imperial household who were or ever had been Christians were to be sent to work in chains on the imperial estates." This decree is unique and remarkable in that definite statutable punishments are assigned to different classes of Christians and in that it so evidently passes over Christians in humble positions. Many Christians of ~~an~~minent position suffered in this persecution—very few lapsed—and the Christians in humble life accompanied them to their martyrdoms without fear. Cyprian, head of the church of Carthage, when he presented himself before the Roman tribunal in his city was only asked his name—no more—he was sentenced to death and pronounced "an enemy to the Roman gods and the sacred laws." Cyprian replied, "God be thanked." The place of execution was a great plain which was thronged with the mourning members of the church. After he was beheaded his remains were removed by his disciples in mingled lamentation and triumph.

The successors of Valerian were Gallienus, A. D. 260–268, and Claudius II, A. D. 268–270. Gallienus was very favourable to Christianity. He published an edict—reversing that of his father Valerian—ordering "that the ministers of the Word should perform their customary duties with freedom and that no one should molest them." "He also restored to the Christians the cemeteries, buildings and lands which had been taken from them." This edict was not only sent to the Roman but also to the church officials. This emperor is the first one who recognized the church as having a legal standing.

**9. By Aurelian** (emperor A. D. 270–275. Special years of persecution, A. D. 274, 275).—Very few Christians suffered—for it was a threatened rather than a real persecu-

tion. In the year of his death, 275 A. D., he prepared an edict against the Christians—having determined to restore the worship of the heathen gods—but the order was not executed. The reign of this emperor records an interesting fact that in an ecclesiastical dispute which he is called upon to decide he refers it to a court of arbitration which “the Christian bishops of Italy and Rome should appoint.” There is here no “hint of the supremacy of the Roman See.”

The successors of Aurelian were Tacitus, A. D. 275, Probus, A. D. 276–282, Carus, A. D. 282, Carinus, A. D. 283, Numerian A. D. 283.

10. By Diocletian (emperor A. D. 284–305. Beginning of persecution 303 A. D.).—Diocletian was installed emperor at Nicomedia. He associated with himself Maximian as colleague in the supreme dominion. In A. D. 293 he associated with himself Constantius and Galerius who were to take part in the government of the empire and succeeded himself and Maximian when they abdicated.

From 268–303 A. D. or about thirty-five years the churches had rest and enjoyed a period of great prosperity. Many members rose to high positions in the state and many large and fine churches were built. Great numbers of converts were received to membership.

Nineteen years of his reign passed before Diocletian manifested any disposition to disturb the Christians. “Many of the most considerable officers of the palace were avowedly Christians. Prisca, the wife of Diocletian, and their daughter Valeria, the unhappy wife of Galerius, if not actually members of the church were favourably disposed to it.”

It was in 303 A. D. when Diocletian was much enfeebled by age and under the influence of unscrupulous advisers that the assault was made upon the church. His younger colleague Galerius advocated stern repression. There were four edicts.

The first “enjoined the destruction of all places of Christian worship and the burning of Christian books. It also

deprived the professors of Christianity of all honours and dignities, ordaining also that without any distinction of rank or degree they should be liable to the torture, and every suit of law should be decided against them ; while on the other hand they were debarred from being plaintiffs in questions of wrong, adultery or theft ; and finally, that they should neither be capable of freedom nor have the right to suffrage."

The second edict issued, a few weeks after the first—the emperor seeming to fear a Christian rebellion—had for "its main enactment that the pastors and officers of the churches everywhere should be thrust into prison and bonds." Prisons were now everywhere filled with the best in the churches.

The third edict issued (Dec. 21, 303 A. D.) on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the emperor's reign was in the nature of an amnesty in opening the prison doors, but for Christians it contained no hope for "Those who had been imprisoned for their faith might be liberated with other captives provided they would consent to offer sacrifice to the gods ; should they refuse the offer, torture was to be applied."

The fourth edict was issued April 20, 304 A. D. "It was ordered," says Eusebius, "that all persons of every people and city should sacrifice and make libations to the gods."

The effects of these successive edicts were appalling. Churches were everywhere destroyed. The Scriptures were burned. Men, women and children were imprisoned, tortured, thrown to wild beasts and burned to death. Virgins and matrons were subjected for their faith, to horrors worse than death. "Maximian in Italy and Africa and Galerius in the East made the most of their opportunities in inflicting suffering." They both delighted in cruelties and gave their desire full swing in this matter.

But the church stood steadfast under this last expiring effort of Paganism—for such it was—to recover its lost ground and rehabilitate itself.

Diocletian and Maximian abdicated in 305 A. D. and

were succeeded by Constantius in the west and Galerius in the east. Constantius was now able to show the favour to the Christians which he desired and the churches of Africa, Italy, Spain, Gaul and Britain were exempted from persecution. But Constantius died in 306 A. D. and in the strife which followed the churches were at the mercies of the provincial governors. Matters did not become really settled until 312 A. D. when Constantine succeeded in getting the reigns of government for the west in his hands. There was a reign of terror in the east, for the Christians, under Galerius from 306-311 A. D. when he died. To be a Christian was to be proscribed and multitudes were tortured and mutilated and put to death. Galerius died a horrible death. "In his dying torments he published a decree of toleration confessing himself baffled and entreating the prayers of Christians on his behalf."

### THE EDICT OF MILAN

**This Edict is the Charter of Christian Liberty** and records the triumph of Christianity in the long battle of three hundred years with the power and intellect of Rome. The two emperors, Constantine for the west and Licinus for the east met at Milan and this edict was issued from that city March, 313 A. D.

This decree "gives full toleration to the Christian faith ordering that all places of worship taken from the Christians should be restored without delay or charge, that any loss they had suffered should be made good and that Christian ministers should be released from all burdensome municipal offices."

Christianity now became the religion of the empire. The persecutions which had been so severe had proved the power of Christianity and that it could overcome the world. The able statesmanship of Constantine perceived very clearly that it was useless to try to resuscitate the old heathen religion. He accepted Christianity not only for itself and its benefits,

but also because it was really the religion of the empire. He did not raise it to that place but accepted the fact of its being in that position. It was, he saw, the only religion of Divine certainties.

In 323 A. D. Constantine became sole emperor of the east and the west. The church now took upon itself new life and power for the emperor of the east had not been wholly in sympathy with Constantine in making Christianity the religion of the empire.

### QUESTIONS

What was the occasion of the persecution of the church? Why was the clash inevitable? What can be said of the heroic elements brought out? What was the creed? What can be said of the Jewish persecution? The origin? Extent and time? Conduct of the persecuted? What were the Roman persecutions? The policy of the empire? The attitude of Christianity? The joining of the issue? The penalties? Extent and time? What were the ten persecutions? By Nero? By Domitian? By Trajan? By Marcus Aurelius? By Septimius Severus? By Maximinus? By Decius? By Valerian? By Aurelian? By Diocletian? Give an account of the Edict of Milan and its importance to the church.

## STUDY X

### THE CHURCH IN VICTORY

#### THE RAPID GROWTH

**The Situation** (from the resurrection of Christ to 323 A. D.).—When Christianity first began to be preached it found many difficulties and many enemies opposing it. The Jewish rulers and, then, the Roman officials and populace placed every possible obstacle in the way. The priests of the heathen religions supported by the empire and the keenest and deepest philosophical thinkers tried to shoulder it into the ditch. It was ridiculed and lampooned by the ablest satirists of the day. Every foul crime was charged upon its followers. The believers in the Christ were tortured, mutilated, thrown to wild beasts, until the doers of these things themselves grew weary in their work and ceased. Yet in spite of everything the church grew and increased rapidly in numbers and in power.

The expansion of Christianity in the first years of its existence is one of the marvels of history.

“Seventy years after the founding of the very first Gentile church in Syrian Antioch, Pliny wrote in the strongest terms about the spread of Christianity throughout remote Bithynia, a spread which in his view already threatened other cults throughout the province. Seventy years later still the Paschal controversy reveals the existence of a Christian federation of churches, stretching from Lyons to Edessa, with its headquarters situated at Rome. Seventy years later again, the Emperor Decius—the fierce persecutor—declared he would sooner have a rival emperor in Rome than a Christian bishop. And ere another seventy years had passed, the cross was sewn upon the Roman colours.” This new faith came out into the open. It did not wait to be



searched for, but proclaimed its doctrines and principles publically in the very citadels of the heathen religion and philosophy. As Professor Harnack writes, in a recent work, "Christianity was a religion of towns and cities; the larger the town or city (even relatively, it is probable) was the number of the Christians. This lent it an extraordinary advantage."

**The Testimony**—only a small portion of which can be given here—to the wonderful expansion of Christianity is ample and convincing, from friend and foe—men who lived at or near the times of which they witness.

Luke tells us of the three thousand who were converted upon the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 41); among these converts were "Parthians and Medes and Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians (Acts 2: 9-11); these men carried the good news of the gospel home with them and became witnesses to others of the truth. Luke further tells us in his narrative in the Acts that, within a little over twenty years after the resurrection of Christ, Paul had carried the gospel to many cities of Asia Minor and of Europe, and then, afterwards, to Rome itself, where he already found the church well established.

Paul corroborates much of the testimony of Luke in his epistles and writes his letters to churches which were well known and flourishing. In writing to the Church in Rome, Paul sends greeting to certain persons in the households of Aristobulus (Romans 16: 10) and Narcissus (Romans 16: 11), who were evidently of some position. "Now as we know that during the reign of Claudius, no one was so powerful and so intimate with the emperor as a certain Narcissus and also that a certain Aristobulus (an uncle of Herod the Great) was living then at the capital as a confidential friend of Claudius, it seems likely that these were the very two persons whose households are mentioned here

by the apostle." Again Paul in writing from Rome to the Philippians says, "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household" (Philippians 4: 22). This implies that the Roman Church contained a special group of Christians who belonged to the household of Cæsar, people who either had had some previous connection with the Philippian church or had recently formed a connection by means of Epaphroditus, the Philippian envoy. Perhaps they had entertained him. We must bear in mind that the city of Philippi was almost entirely Latin (Roman) and that it would naturally have intimate relations with the capital (Acts 16: 21).

Tacitus, the careful Roman historian, in writing of the persecution of the Christians, under Nero in 64 A. D., says of their number that they were a huge multitude—"ingens multitudine." We are prepared for some such statement from what Luke and Paul have said and also from the fact that amid the hundreds of thousands of the dwellers in Rome the Christians were singled out for a fiery trial of their faith. Had the company of Roman Christians been small or obscure they would have attracted little or no attention in the heterogeneous population of Rome.

Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, wrote—to quote him again—in his now celebrated letter—about 112 A. D.—to the Emperor Trajan of the great number of Christians in his province; showing how fast and far the gospel had spread over Asia Minor from the cities where Paul preached.

Justin Martyr—writing about the middle of the second century—says: "For there is not a single race of human beings, barbarians, Greeks, or whatever name you please to call them, nomads or vagrants or herdsmen living in tents, where prayers in the name of Jesus the crucified, are not offered up."

Eusebius (H. E., IV 26) speaks of a remark of Melito to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (A. D. 167-180) that many Imperial rescripts had been published in different cities regarding Christianity, and the fact of the rescript of Pius

to the Common Diet of Asia, which contains a nucleus of truth, says "that many governors in the provinces have already addressed the emperor on the subject of Christianity."

Irenæus of Lyons—writing in the latter part of the second century—says: "Though scattered throughout the whole world, the church carefully keeps this preaching and faith which she has received, as if she dwelt in a single house . . . for although the languages of the world are varied, yet the meaning of the Christian tradition is one and the same. There is no whit of difference in what is believed or handed down by the churches planted in Germany or Iberia or in Gaul or in the East or in Egypt or in Libya or in the central region of the world."

Clement of Alexandria—writing about the close of the second century—says: "The word of our Teacher did not remain in Judæa alone, as did philosophy in Greece, but was poured out over the whole universe, persuading Greeks and barbarians alike in the various nations and villages and cities, winning over whole households, and bringing to the truth each individual of those who had believed, as well as not a few philosophers."

Tertullian of Carthage—writing near the beginning of the third century—says: "The cry is that the state is infested with Christians, in the fields, in the villages, in the lodging-houses! Both sexes, every age and condition of life, rank itself, are gone over to the Christian name. . . . If we wanted to play the part of avowed enemies, not merely of secret avengers, would we be lacking in numbers or resources? Do the Mauri, Marcomanni, the Parthians themselves, or any nation however great, belonging to one country and living within its own boundaries, do these forsooth, outnumber one that is all over the world? We are but of yesterday. Yet we have filled all the places you frequent—cities, lodging-houses, villages, townships, markets, the camp itself, tribes, town councils, the palace, the senate and the forum. All we have left you is your temples."

The pagan (Porphyry) in Macarius Magnes, IV 3, "Behold every corner of the universe has experienced the gospel, and the whole ends and bounds of the world are occupied with the gospel."

Eusebius (H. E. IX 9) speaks of Maximinus Daza's Rescript to Sabinus and that the emperors "Diocletian and Maximian issued edicts for the suppression of Christianity when they saw almost all men deserting the worship of the gods and attaching themselves to the Christian people."

This testimony coming from so many sources—however much it may be minimized—indicates that the Roman Empire was in grip of a mighty power which was moving steadily and irresistibly to the accomplishment of certain ends.

**Some Effects** were: 1. The changed lives of thousands of believers in all parts of the empire. Men steeped in the fearful immoralities of the times upon accepting Christ, were cleansed and began to lead new and pure lives. This miracle of the changed life, repeatedly performed, before the eyes of the pagans was continually winning converts and changing the moral and spiritual outlook of whole communities. A new spirit was infused in men; they knew how to suffer, to be deprived of property and to endure indignities for their faith, but they had no harsh words for those who made them undergo such hardship. 2. The undermining and cessation of the worship in the heathen temples generally and the refusal of people to bring offerings and make sacrifices to the gods. 3. The setting aside of the much vaunted philosophy of the age and the raising up of new standards. 4. The persecutions which were bitter and cruel to the last degree. If all the Christian writings had perished in the persecution of Diocletian—as he intended they should—and only the records of the acts of the persecutors had been preserved they would have shown how mighty this Christian movement was. For no sooner was a persecution passed—no matter how severe—than Christianity sprang up stronger than ever. The rapid expansion

of Christianity is shown by the great and persistent efforts made to crush it. 5. Growing organizations of Christians in all parts of the empire, which daily became more powerful.

## SOURCES OF POWER

Whence did Christianity derive its power? There have been many attempts to account for the marvellous increase of Christianity—outside the supernatural—in the first three centuries of our era. The best known of these is,

Gibbon's *Five Causes* of the Growth of Christianity: "1. The zeal which the early Christians inherited from the Jews. 2. The doctrine of the immortality of the soul and of future rewards and punishments. 3. The miraculous powers claimed by the primitive church. 4. The morality of the early Christians. 5. Their well ordered ecclesiastical organization." It has been pointed out that, while these causes may explain to some extent the increase of Christianity, they do not explain themselves and that they are effects rather than causes. Dr. Newman, in considering them, questions whether they should be regarded as causes at all. He says: "1. Christians had zeal for Christianity after they were converted, not before. 2. The doctrines of future punishment and eternal glory do not affect men until they believe in them. However much the rewards of a future life may be made attractive they do not of themselves, now, keep bad men from leading evil lives. Why should they have turned men, then, from their pleasant sins to a mortified existence, to a life of ill-usage, fright, contempt and desolation? 3. When there were so many false teachers claiming to have miraculous powers and performing magical rites, the Christians made comparatively little of this element. 4. The morality of the Christians seems rather to have repelled than attracted the heathen. 5. The well ordered ecclesiastical organizations were decidedly the results of the fervid inward spiritual life rather than the means of it."

The Supernatural guidance of the church must be considered as the chief source of its power.

The Christians had faith in a Divine Person. Jesus gave the command to preach the gospel to all the world, to His disciples, and then said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28 : 18-20). Again just before His ascension, He commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1 : 8, 4-8).

"The triumphant zeal of the first Christians is intelligible, if we remember that it was zeal for Christ, their Lord and Master." This was the purport of Peter's speech when three thousand persons were converted. Again Peter declared, "Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Paul said to the Corinthian church, "For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified." It was the asserted faith in God the Father and Jesus Christ, as supreme over everything earthly, that caused the persecutions. The Christians had only to deny Christ to go free. The test was always upon belief in Christ.

Origen—writing about 250 A. D.—says : "In all Greece, and in all barbarous races within our world, there are tens of thousands who have left their national laws and customary gods for the Law of Moses and the Word of Jesus Christ ; though to adhere to that Law is to incur the hatred of idolaters, and to have embraced that Word is to incur the risk of death as well. And considering how, in a few years, and with no great store of teachers, in spite of the attacks which have cost us life and property, the preaching of that Word has found its way into every part of the world, so that Greeks and barbarians, wise and unwise, adhered to the re-



ligion of Jesus—doubtless it is a work greater than any work of man.”

When the first general council met at Nicea under the auspices of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, Eusebius, the great church historian was present and he tells us that delegates were in attendance from all over the world; Syrians, Cilicians, Phœnicians, Arabians, Palestinians, Egyptians, Thebans, Lybians, Persians, Scythians and from Pontus, Galatia, Pamphylia, Thrace, Macedonia, Achaia, Spain, Rome, and other regions.

They framed a creed, which is known as the Nicene creed, as a consensus of their belief, and we see at once that it is the same gospel which Peter and Paul preached. The creed reads:

“We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible; and in the one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, only begotten of the Father, that is of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Lights, very God of very God; begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made in heaven and earth; who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate, was made man, suffered, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, and He will come again to judge the living and the dead. And in the Holy Ghost. Those who say there was a time when He was not, and He was not before He was begotten, and He was made of nothing and the Son of God is created, that He is mutable or subject to change, the Catholic church anathematizes.” The men who formulated their belief in this manner had passed through the fearful persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian, and Galerius and many of them bore the marks of torture upon their persons—they knew for whom they had suffered, even Jesus Christ their Divine Lord.

Given this belief in a Divine Person and faith in the morality, the immortality of the soul, the future judgment,



which He taught, follow as natural consequences. And what was more natural than that those who believed these things should gather together in well ordered ecclesiastical organizations. Christ was the life-giving source of power.

**The Human Instrumentality.**—Jesus Christ worked through men. He said to His disciples, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." Christian teachers, writers and preachers called not only upon their Lord, but used also their natural powers to set forth the gospel. They employed every form of argument to induce others to believe as they believed. When they were tortured, mutilated and condemned to death they expected no supernatural interference to save them from torture or death. Their Lord had tasted the cup of suffering and they tasted it with Him. They were conscious of being the people of God and living with Him a life which no outward evil circumstances could effect; this gave them great power.

### THE CLASSES REACHED

What classes of people were reached by Christianity? This is an interesting question and fortunately there is much material upon which to base an answer.

**The Common People.**—This class constitutes, by far, always the large majority. Christianity at once appealed to it and found in its appeal a ready response. If the gospel had been unable to touch the hearts of the common people there would have been little hope of its surviving for any length of time. Instead of a reproach it is the glory of Christ that the multitude thronged Him when on earth and gathered around His standard after His ascension. He came to heal the broken hearted, to give courage to the discouraged and to lift up the fallen.

**The Cultured, the Wealthy, the Aristocratic, the Official and the Court Classes.**—The mission of Christianity was to all sorts and conditions of people. It ministered not only to the low but to the high in the social

scale. It was a brotherhood not of poverty or wealth, but of the heart through faith in Christ. Professor Harnack, in a recent work, has taken much pains to give instance after instance of the conquest of Christ over the hearts of those in high station in the world. "Even Paul indicates that some people who were wise and mighty and of good birth had become Christians. And this is borne out by the Book of Acts. The proconsul Sergius Paulus (Acts 13 : 7-12) was brought over to the faith in Cyprus, Dionysius, the Areopagite in Athens (17 : 34) and not a few women of good position in Thessalonica (17 : 4). So with Berea (17 : 12)." In Rome Pomponia Græcina, a distinguished lady, and T. Flavius Clemens—uncle of the Emperor Domitian—and his wife Flavia Domatilla were converts. It is related by Dio Cassius that many others followed in this way. Very early Christianity attracted to itself men of great ability as expounders and defenders of the faith ; these writers have already been quoted—in this book—and their works—or what remains of them—have been gathered under the title of "The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers." A number of these men were converted philosophers and men of high standing in the literary world. For a religious and philosophical writer of the highest grade Paul himself stands unequalled. The catacombs of Rome—see Study V—were dug in grounds belonging to many of the noble families of the imperial city, and in some cases constructed and adorned by their special order, and under their care. Christianity was making such headway amongst the wealthy and cultured classes in the time of the Emperor Valerian that his second rescript against the Christians takes notice of none but the upper classes and members of Cæsar's household, outside the clergy. "Senators and prominent men and Roman knights are to lose their position, and moreover to be stripped of their property ; if they still persist in being Christians after their goods have been taken away from them, they are to be beheaded." In the first part of the reign of Diocletian—before he became a persecutor and

when he and his colleagues favoured Christianity—Eusebius tells us: “The emperor even trusted our members with provinces to govern and discharged them from the duty of offering sacrifice.” We know also that Diocletian’s wife and daughter were in all probability followers of the Christ. Soldiers play an important part in the chronicle of martyrdoms. There are numbers of instances of centurions and officers of high position who on being accused of being Christians acknowledged that they were and stripping the insignia of their rank from their bodies went bravely to their death as soldiers of Jesus Christ.

A number of the severest persecutions grew out of the fact that Christianity was pressing its way so rapidly into the upper ranks of culture, position and wealth.

### THE WORLD CHURCH

**Conditions.**—In the Roman empire was realized the world state as it had never been actualized before. This was accomplished by the destruction of nationalities by Roman conquest. This state of things was accompanied also by a dissolution of the creeds of the nations, which had been conquered by Rome. Hitherto each nation had had its gods whose worship had tended actually to keep it from uniting with other nations. The idea of a universal religion was foreign to the thought of the separate nationalities. One result was that, in the breaking up of the national creeds, a period of skepticism set in and Rome attempted—in her efforts for a universal religion—to make an eclectic one with the worship of the Roman emperor as the one form of worship coextensive with the empire. But this state of affairs was unnatural and unsatisfying. Meantime the law of the world state—which Rome had become—spread over the world. “All freemen throughout the empire were made Roman citizens. Tribal and national ideas about the power of fathers over sons, husbands over wives, and masters over slaves, gave place to principles of natural right

and universal justice. Roman law, like the Mosaic Law, became a pedagogue to lead men to Christ."

**Principles.**—Christianity was the first to set up the claim to be "The World Religion" and the Roman empire had prepared for and was ready for this claim—even though it was resisted. In this religion men as men, irrespective of race, nation or condition are accepted. Bond and free, rich and poor, high and low, barbarian and civilized, are commanded and entreated to seek pardon and reconciliation through Jesus Christ. He is the One who is perfectly able to satisfy all the demands of the true religion and become the centre from which all its forces operate.

There are five principles: 1. The fatherhood of God. 2. The Saviourhood of Christ. 3. The brotherhood of man. 4. The law of service. 5. The law of love.

Christianity has an incomparable sublimity of doctrine—above all other forms of religion and "an inexhaustible adaptability to different ages, nationalities, classes and individuals . . . by countless experiments. Century after century it has proved its congruity with the aspirations not of any sect or nation or age, but of the spiritual nature of man. Under the most varied conditions of prosperity and misery, of peace and war, of wealth and poverty, of civilization and barbarism, of culture and ignorance, of race, period, climate, government, age and sex, it has been recognized as furnishing the supreme type of moral excellence and the best satisfaction of man's spiritual needs."

**Perfection** of all religions. Christianity shows its superiority in that:

1. God does not stand apart from the world, neither is He identified with it; He is in the world and over it and not far from any one of us. In His character God "unites with infinite power and wisdom the moral attributes of holiness and love."

2. "Man is declared to be made in the image of God and qualified therefore for conscious intercourse and fellowship with God."

3. Sin is shown to arise not from physical evil, but from the conscious disobedience of a righteous command of God, and to remain in the world through continued willful disobedience of the wise laws of a good God.

4. Pardon and reconciliation for man are effected in and through Christ in a way in which God is not compromised, but His holiness and justice are shown. Life becomes a training school for a higher abode.

5. The heaven for which we are bidden to strive is not a haven of forgetfulness or a realm of sensual pleasure, but an abode of the pure and righteous.

Christianity is the only universal and everlasting religion. "For on all human things and what was eternal and what was transient alike, it had set the sign of the cross."

### QUESTIONS

What can be said of the rapid growth of Christianity? The situation? The testimony to the expansion? Some effects? What were the sources of power? Gibbon's five causes? The supernatural guidance? The human instrumentality? What were the classes reached? The common people? The cultured, the wealthy, etc.? What can be said of the World Church? Conditions in the empire? Principles of the church? Perfection?



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